

# **Jewish Mysticism and Magic**

An anthropological perspective

**Maureen Bloom**

## JEWISH MYSTICISM AND MAGIC

*Jewish Mysticism and Magic: An Anthropological Perspective* explores the origins of mysticism in Judaism and the associated development of the Jewish magical tradition.

Using the methodology of structural analysis and the theory of structural transformation, texts of early and late antiquity are analysed with reference to symbolic rites and rituals. Scriptural and Talmudic texts resonate with ideas of 'sacred and mundane' and ritual 'purity and impurity' and reflect a worldview where an omnipotent God governed a cosmos in which disorder vied with order. Particular features include:

- Discussion of the relationship between Babylonian culture and Jewish laws and customs.
- Examination of how, paradoxically, esoteric beliefs attained and retained powerful influence on Jewish culture.
- Analysis of texts showing the influence of early cultural constructs on Jewish magical spells and formulae and the persistence of their symbolic significance.

This wide-ranging study provides a unique anthropological perspective on Jewish mysticism and magic and will be essential reading for students and scholars who are interested in Jewish studies, anthropology and mysticism.

**Maureen Bloom** gained her PhD at Brunel University. She has taught Medical Anthropology at Goldsmiths and is now Assistant Reviews Editor for the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

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IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER  
MOSHE LEIB SEGAL HA-LEVI  
AND FOR MY GRANDCHILDREN





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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Transliteration is often a matter of taste or choice. I have tried to use an accurate and consistent system when representing the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. At times 'ch' or 'h' have been used for the letter 'het', while other gutturals are sometimes indicated with the use of ' or ' before the initial letter (alef or ayyin). I have used 'kh' for 'khaf' and 'q' for 'quf', unless other traditionally and generally accepted forms exist. Where possible, when quoting directly from their works, I have followed systems used by authors.

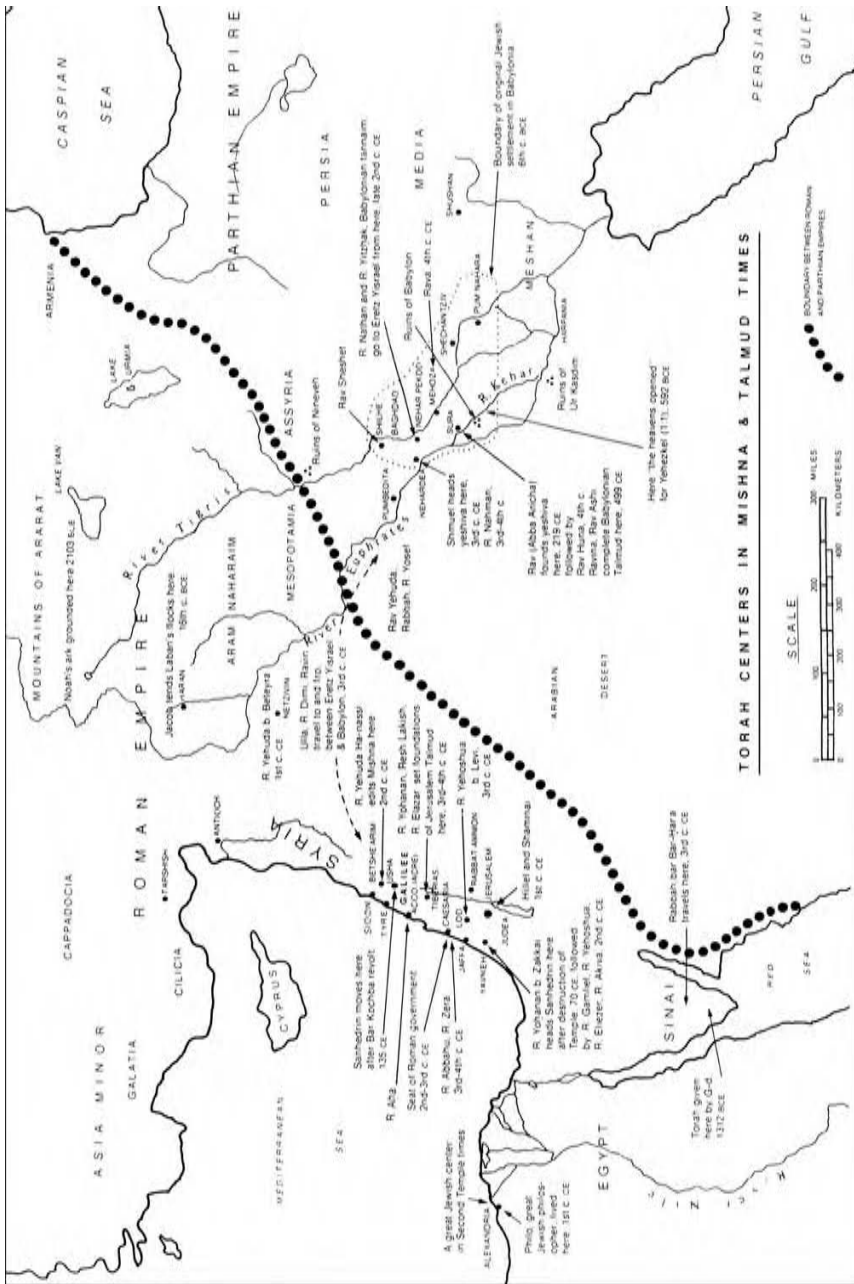


Figure 1 Torah centres in Mishna and Talmud times (courtesy of Feldheim Publishers).

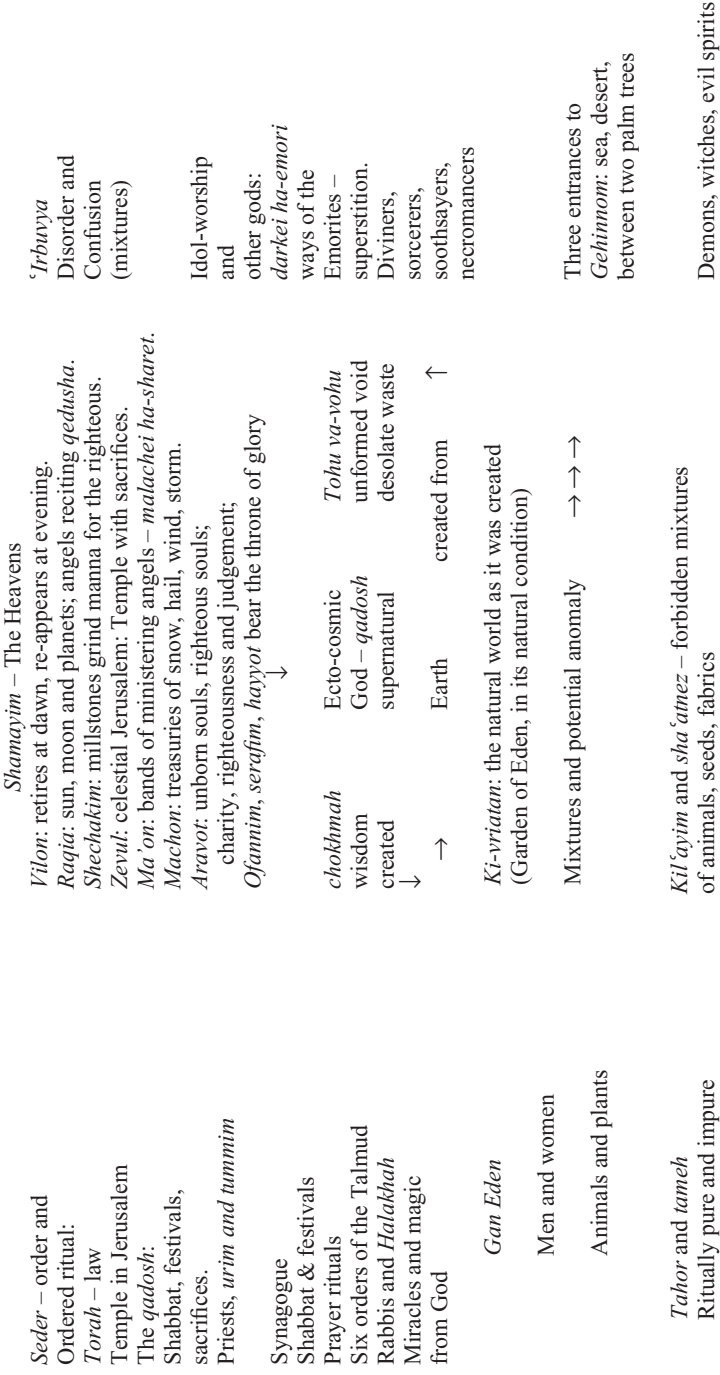


Structure of ancient Hebrew lore according to the literary traditions

The Written Law – <i>Tanakh</i> (compiled around 400 BCE)	The Oral Law – Talmud (compiled around 500 CE)
Torah – the law	<i>Midrash and Aggada</i>
Laws to regulate society e.g. the Decalogue	Mythical fables
Laws of ritual purity	Laws regulating the minutiae of daily behaviour for the general populace, and, for the select few, requirements for ascent through the <i>Hekhalot</i> (heavenly halls) to the <i>Merkavah</i> (chariot) and God's throne
The legends	Additional material relating to Torah legend; a panoply of angels in the seven heavenly halls
Judges, kings, prophets i.e. conquest of Canaan, the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, destruction of the Temple, exile and the vision of Ezekiel – (the fiery chariot). Return from Babylon; priestly cult in the Second Temple	(i) 'Rational' medicine – recipes etc., (ii) 'irrational' medicine – spells, amulets and incantations against demons
Sacrificial offerings as mediation between man and God	The supernatural
Communal prayer as mediation between man and God	The supernatural
Orthodox mediation by priests in a sacred space	Unorthodox mediation by Rabbis in the celestial realms, and by healers and magicians in the demonic realms

Figure 2

The Rabbinic worldview



All ordered by *Halakhah* – the correct ‘way’ to live regarding food, sexual practice, everyday behaviour. The human body as instrument of *Torah* – the law: study and practice as embodiment.  
*Brit* – covenant to obey the law: worship of one God, possession of Canaan, Sabbath observance, circumcision of males. Sanctification of the Temple mediated through the body: thirty-nine activities related to Temple service and ritual become embodied in acts prohibited on the Sabbath.

Figure 3 *She’ol* – The Netherworld



# Part I



*Figure 4* Jewish Aramaic magic bowl (unpublished: private collection) (photo credit: Dr Florentina Badalanova Geller).

## PROLOGUE

This book examines and analyses early Hebrew and Jewish literature, offering a synthesis that is methodologically based in the anthropological tradition. Its opening sections introduce the Jewish scriptures, known to Jews as *Tanakh* and to the world as ‘the Old Testament’. The discussion moves to the later Rabbinical commentaries, the *Talmud*, and concludes with a selection of post-biblical Jewish texts. I do not seek to provide purely anthropological interpretations of these texts, nor do I superimpose a template from which to coax a set of diagrams or figures. I do, however, apply an anthropological technique – that of structural analysis – to show the development of certain themes and topics within the texts. In dealing with the emergence of particular themes, I shall argue that an analysis of those themes demonstrates evidence of progressive structural transformations relating to the beliefs and customs of Jewish tradition. Briefly, these themes relate to ancient Hebrew sacrificial rites, the nature of the relationship between the Hebrews and their God, and the development of rabbinic mysticism and magic; however, literature regarding miracles will not be treated. Magical texts were not written to procure or induce miracles, but were, in the main, emphatic and confident appeals to sacred symbols or beings, made in order to ward off the attacks of demonic forces.

It is not my intention to provide a micro-analysis of the minutiae of rites, laws or customs, but rather to observe the origins of a bigger picture emerging from the tradition. These origins, dating back two thousand years, are relevant still, and are in evidence in the contemporary private and public spheres. Today both in Israel and within orthodox diaspora communities, one sees affixed to doors, walls and windows of homes, business premises and even motor vehicles, various amulets that echo magical prayer formulae. Also commonly found are, for example, laminated cards inscribed with amuletic verses that incorporate the tradition of using patriarchal and matriarchal names (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or Sarah, Rachel and Leah) as well as the names of three powerful angels dating back to the Talmudic period, as symbolic phylacteries for the bedrooms of infants or even older children. I am offering an explanation for these contemporary phenomena with a particular selection of ancient texts, analysing them in terms of general themes, where their underlying cultural constructs and symbolic significance have persisted and endured through time.

Bourdieu has described this phenomenon:

It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know. The *habitus* is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be nonetheless 'sensible' and 'reasonable'. That part of practices which remains obscure in the eyes of their own producers is the aspect by which they are objectively adjusted to other practices and to the structures of which the principle of their production is itself the product.

(Bourdieu 1977: 79)

I would argue therefore that amongst the many who use contemporary amuletic modes of prophylaxis, few actually know the source, either in time or place, of the origins of their protective symbols and writings. In an offering of explication, I suggest that the subject of this book will give some indication as to the roots of Jewish use of symbols that date back to early sacrificial traditions and magical enterprises. Bourdieu wrote that *habitus* was 'history turned into nature'. That concept gives rise to the practical realities, 'the production of practice', whereby the relationship between a social structure and the conditions that allow for the operation of *habitus*, is finally evident.

It is difficult to launch into a description of rites and rituals without providing a background, and this is one of the complexities of presenting my argument. Familiarity with scriptural texts is a fundamental requirement for the understanding of Rabbinic writings. These writings, *the Talmud*, consist of *Mishnah* and *Gemara* where *Mishnah* constitutes a 'repetition' of the scriptural texts, and *Gemara* provides the 'completion' of the *Mishnah*. In Rabbinic theory the discussion of the Mishnaic laws is considered a commentary on and extension of the scriptures. My initial task is, therefore, to scrutinize scriptural texts in order to establish the frame of reference for the Talmudic and non-Talmudic texts examined later.

Despite the traditional ideology of continuity between Scripture and Talmud, it is evident from the texts that the conceptual world of the ancient Hebrews, (later called 'the Children of Israel'), differed from the conceptual world of the Rabbinic Sages. The relationship depicted between God and Adam and Eve was one of direct, open communication. The Rabbis are not so privileged. The early relationship between God and his creatures changes over time, and divine revelation was reserved for only a few righteous people. God's promises of blessing and well-being are combined with exhortations to obey all his laws. Failure to do so would result in a cursed existence. The expulsion from the Garden of Eden was a validation of God's threat. Knowledge of all things 'Good' and 'Evil' and the gift of eternal life are not meant for humankind, for only God is omniscient and immortal.

In the *Tanakh*, privileged access to God is mediated by sacrifice. After Cain

and Abel offered of their produce to God in a sacrificial rite, God spoke directly to Cain. God also spoke to the righteous Noah, telling him to build an Ark in order to escape the coming Flood. When Noah was eventually saved, he made a sacrificial offering to God in thanksgiving. Abraham was told, as a sign of his devotion to God, to offer up his son Isaac in sacrifice, but the divinely arranged substitution of a ram saved Isaac from immolation. Later, the revelation of God to the people as *oikoumen*, or community, had its culmination at Sinai, where all present heard the blare of trumpets and the thunderous rumblings of the mountain, all saw the smoke and lightning, and subsequently heard the word of God. But only Moses and the elders enjoyed the vision of a sapphire pavement that is considered to be part of God's throne and majesty, and Moses alone ascended the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. Sacrifices to God followed the revelation at Sinai, and the people acknowledged God's power and made communal pledges to obey his commandments. The sacrificial rite was accompanied by a sprinkling of the blood of sacrificed beasts over the mixed multitude, the *erev rav*, at the foot of Mount Sinai.

The significance of a sacrificial offering is given as evidence of a binding agreement between humanity and the divine. Regular ritual sacrificial offerings, *qorbanot*, are depicted throughout the Pentateuchal texts, particularly in Leviticus, the so-called Priestly code. Sacrifices took place in the wilderness, but later, when the Temple was built in Jerusalem, God decreed that sacrifices could be offered only at the Temple.

Prayers accompanied sacred services, and when the Second Temple was destroyed, the already well-established traditional liturgy took the place of the sacrificial rites. Alongside prayer, a new tradition developed in which the priest-sacrificers were replaced by Rabbis chosen for their learning. Esoteric Rabbinic learning and mastery of mystical texts hint at the ascribed power and ability of certain Rabbis to control events by means of magical incantations and prayer formulae. Rabbinic holiness was a recognized attribute of some Sages, and their particular ability to gain access to God's celestial kingdom was enshrined in Talmudic legend and '*Hekhalot and Merkava*' texts. This same ability was utilized in the exercise of magical praxes, and the beneficent forces of God's kingship were then made available to those who sought them.

Later Jewish beliefs sustained in Rabbinic teachings focus largely on matters of ritual purity and forbidden mixtures, (deriving from the scriptures), and upon the evolution of a complicated angelology and demonology. The nexus of scriptural teaching and Rabbinic exegesis is the concept of order, signified by obedience to God's laws. The disordered existence brought about by lapses into 'the ways of the Emorites', *darkei ha-Emori*, includes worship of gods other than the single God who made Covenants with his people, indulgence in the practices of wilful bloodshed and murder, incestuous or banned sexual relationships, or in practices regarded as forbidden because they were part of the realm of witchcraft and sorcery, where demonic maleficence threatens well-being.

The battle against demons and misfortune was waged with magical incantations



embodying particular notions of God's holiness and power that were cryptically incorporated into letters, words and formulae. Many of these letters, words and formulae have as their inspiration and frame of reference the earliest significant evidence of a reaching out to the numinous in the scriptures, namely the sacrificial offerings made by those associated with such rites. God was concerned with the welfare of his people, but was unwilling to tolerate infractions of his codes of law. The power of such a God in areas of prevention and cure was a positive element in guaranteeing the efficacy of a ritual performance according to those codes of law. Whether the ritual performances were sacrificial offerings, ritualized prayer formulae, or magical incantations and praxes, they might ensure access to the divine kingdom and its power as long as they were executed within the constraints of acceptable requisites.

Rabbinic mystics of late antiquity had generated ideas that gradually filtered into the domain of magic and spell-writing. Rabbis themselves wrote spells for the health and wealth of paying customers, and these incantations appear on amulets and magic bowls. Less sophisticated spells, curses, incantations and imprecations were written by those eager to take advantage of the market in a belief system where demons were thought to influence fate and fortune. These ancient ideas were used throughout the years following the diaspora after the destruction of the Second Temple.

This book treats only the earlier traditions, hence the very brief inclusion of material relating to the emergence of the Kabbalah and Hasidism. Throughout the centuries the desire of the Jews for a close and personal relationship with their God has fuelled the aspiration to refine knowledge and practice that would lead towards passage to the Divine. The esoteric traditions of the mystical Sages of Late Antiquity were transformed by influential scholars and Rabbis, who followed centuries after, into other ways of approaching the kingdom of the holy God. Through the writings of the *Zohar*, '*Book of Radiance/Splendour*', the *Kabbalah* that emanated from mediaeval Spain (in thirteenth-century Spain and later in Italy – Mantua and Cremona around 1560), the concepts were refined and elaborated in Kabbalistic treatises that influenced generations of Jews in Europe. Still later, the concept of *d'vekut* – cleaving to God – was made central to the adaptation of Kabbalistic ideas utilized by the Pietists, or *Hasidim*. In their development of *Hasidism*, a group of exceptional Rabbis of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Central and Eastern Europe believed that a mystical union with God would be possible via meditation and prayers of an ecstatic nature.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

My reading and interpretation of the works of early Judaism was prompted by a wish to discover and uncover an underlying social reality as revealed by the creativity of the authors. In the case of the rabbinical authors, I hoped to expose the mindset of this group of men who, in the main, succeeded in persuading their co-religionists to accept unquestioningly not only their opinions but also their decisions on issues that impinge on almost every detail of daily existence.

The texts under discussion are dated from Early to Late Antiquity, a division conveniently marked by the conquests of Alexander the Great around 331 BCE. Alexander's Macedonian armies brought the ideas and cultural mores of Hellenistic civilization to the Levant and beyond, including areas in which major settlements of Jewish communities had been established following the first Diaspora of 586 BCE. The number of diasporic communities was increased after the destruction of the Second Temple in CE 70.

While looking closely at Talmudic medical texts, I expected to find therapies and remedies of a restrained and conformist nature, for the omnipotent God of Israel has the power to smite with disease and heal, to give and take away life itself, and, ultimately, to raise the dead.<sup>1</sup> Instead I found myself confronted with a paradox: strange recipes and magical incantations representing an apparent conflict with traditional Jewish beliefs.

The paradox of an omnipotent God challenged by magic or magicians drove me back to examine biblical laws and doctrinal beliefs, and drew my attention in particular to ancient Hebrew notions of purity, the sacred, sacrifice and sin. I then examined the development of magic in Talmudic texts, in Genizah material and the inscriptions on magic bowls. This meant extending my original self-imposed time frame of 150 BCE to CE 500 (the period in which the Talmud was conceived and finally edited) to a date around 200 years later. There are, nevertheless, good reasons to broaden the scope of the enquiry to include these materials. Scholars of Aramaic and Mandaic<sup>2</sup> magic bowl texts have assured me that these artefacts fall well within my original time frame, while scholars dealing with Genizah material agree that the tradition of writing magic spells and amulets is one of early antiquity. Artefacts produced as late as the seventh century are definitely part of this older tradition, even though archaeologically speaking, they are of 'late antiquity'.

Fluency in Hebrew and some Aramaic has helped me in the analysis of the *Miqrah*, or Torah, the earliest holy Jewish writings. I have studied Talmudic texts and examined *Hekhalot* and *Merkavah* literature, which is an esoteric genre. Texts inscribed on Babylonian magic bowls are difficult to decipher and translate, and the same applies to the amulet texts of the Genizah. I have therefore relied on English translations of texts in some instances, one of the most valuable of which is *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine* by Julius Preuss.<sup>3</sup> Leading academics in the fields into which I have ventured have been willing to give advice on or discuss their own work or deal with my problems with the texts.

An edition of the Talmud, one with a translation of the Aramaic into modern Hebrew, and another with a new English translation, has been prepared by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, a leading Israeli Talmudist. Nevertheless, the problems facing scholars of Talmudic medicine are many, for the present-day knowledge of Sumerian and Akkadian was simply not available to early translators. Whether a plant mentioned in a Talmudic medical recipe is the same as a plant mentioned in an Akkadian medical text on a cuneiform tablet, and whether the given translation of that plant name in a particular edition of the Talmud is correct, is the sort of question that drives the research of the Assyriologists. Contemporary scholars and physicians read of the symptoms listed in cuneiform texts, pondering differences and similarities in an effort to identify diseases such as epilepsy or episodes of fever.

Scholars of mystical texts analyse structure and form, and, more particularly, address the problem of how the 'Riders, or Descenders, of the Chariot' (*Yordei Merkavah*) can 'ascend' to the seventh heaven by means of a verb which means 'to descend' – *yored*. Those Sages who succeeded in 'ascending' to the Chariot were those who gained control over certain aspects of bodily purity and ritualized magic formulae, and were very much 'Masters' of these, and associated, phenomena.

### Mesopotamia as a 'watershed'

Several common traditions of 'westernized' society have their sources in the alluvial basin of Iraq, dating from around 3000 BCE. In the land between the Tigris and Euphrates, that is Mesopotamia (*mesos*: between, *potamos*: river), urban development and the use of canals and water wheels in irrigation systems prepared the way for manufacture and trade. With the invention of the plough, harrow and threshing-sledge came the extensive development of agriculture and animal husbandry, allowing for the bulk transport of agricultural produce. Lower Mesopotamia was transformed 'into a fabulously abundant source of agricultural surpluses, especially in the third millennium . . . and was the bread-basket of the ancient world as late as Achaemenid and Seleucid times'.<sup>4</sup> The Uruk domination of trade and commerce in the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and beyond demanded the development of commercial records, the traces of which can be seen on tablets excavated in many archaeological sites in that area. James

writes of ‘the carefully ordered Babylonian society, dependent on its day-to-day records of business transactions, sales of land, wills, loans of money, etc.’.<sup>5</sup>

The Sumerians, who planned and executed the building of monumental projects in their cities, developed a political system that has been defined as a primitive democracy or oligarchy. This sophisticated society produced art and literature as well as the enduring legacy of the 360-degree circle and the sixty-minute hour.

The writing system invented in Mesopotamia around 3500 BCE enabled the Sumerians to use pictograms and cuneiform writing on clay tablets and on cylinder or stamp seals. Letter-writing with sealed envelopes was a feature of daily life and the seals ‘performed their historic functions of signalling ownership, obligation, or authority’.<sup>6</sup> This pragmatic aspect of social life enabled the concept of a seal to act symbolically in mystical and magical incantations, as a powerful means of curtailing the influence of demons or accessing the authority of angels.

Although warfare was a constant feature of life in Mesopotamia, and changes of overlordship took place over hundreds of years, the system of import and export allowed for the dissemination of not only an economic, but also a material culture. In around 2370 BCE, Sumerian culture was supplanted by Akkadian culture, and while Sumerian retained its function as the language of learning and liturgy,<sup>7</sup> the language of cuneiform inscriptions gradually changed from non-semitic Sumerian to semitic Akkadian.<sup>8</sup> The letters we now use in order to express our thoughts first appeared in nascent forms as the *alef–bet–gimmel–dalet* of Hebrew or the *alpha–beta–gamma–delta* of Greek, with roots in the Phoenician letter-system of around 1000 BCE, which itself stems from proto-Canaanite.<sup>9</sup>

The apparent absence of Egyptian influences upon the literature, customs or traditions under discussion is a question that should be raised. The early and lasting Babylonian contacts with the Hebrews of early antiquity offered a social life that differed from that of the Egyptian way of life. The development of city-states in Mesopotamia and the resultant contrast with the unified kingdom of ancient Egypt may provide the reason. Childe and Frankfort ‘conducted detailed comparisons of the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Southern Mesopotamia and concluded that they had evolved in distinctive ways and remained fundamentally different from one another’.<sup>10</sup> The ‘common culture’ of the city-states was a sharp contrast to the divine monarchy in Egypt, whose ‘high culture had developed at the Royal court’.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, many contemporary European institutions and customs, upon which the smooth running of everyday life depends, have their origin in the ancient Near-East despite commonly held beliefs that they are based exclusively on Greek or Roman experience.<sup>12</sup> Bottéro shows the development of Babylonian ‘scientific’ reasoning not only in legal matters, but also in medical diagnoses: ‘they understood that two phenomena which constantly succeed each other are necessarily connected one to the other: *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*’.<sup>13</sup>

Equally, in many respects, the religious and legal heritage to which contemporary Jews lay claim comes very largely from Babylon.<sup>14</sup> The biblical myth of creation, where earth and sky are separated from a primordial sea, and the story of a boat in a great flood, have precedents in Babylonian exemplars.<sup>15</sup> The *lex talionis* of Hammurabi prefigures the Mosaic Law of Retaliation: 'If a man has destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy: they shall destroy his eye. If he has broken his limb: they shall break the (same) limb'.<sup>16</sup> Yaron cites the Laws of Eshnunna:

If a man bit and severed the nose of a man – one mina of silver he shall weigh out. An eye – one mina; a tooth – half a mina; an ear – half a mina. A slap in the face – ten shekels of silver he shall weigh out.  
(Yaron 1988: 69)

He notes that

in later times the 'slap in the face' is the insult *par excellence* mentioned in the famous passage in Matthew 5:39. Talmudic law distinguishes further between an ordinary slap, and one inflicted with the back of the hand; this is considered as even more insulting, and draws double damages [*Mishna* Baba Qamma 8.6l; *Tosefta* *ibid.* 9,31: 'since it is *makkah shel bizzayon* – a blow of contempt'].<sup>17</sup>  
(Yaron 1988: 286)

Evidence of both Babylonian and Hellenistic philosophy is found in the writings of the Talmud, but the greater influence is Babylonian. James asserts that

Babylonia, from the 8th century BC onwards, was widely respected by its contemporaries (including the Assyrians, Hebrews and Greeks) as a centre of literature, possessing an immense corpus of written knowledge from mathematics and astronomy to medicine and philosophy.  
(James 1993: 282)

Momigliano observes that

with so much in common, Greeks and Jews do not seem to have spoken to each other. One explanation is only too obvious. They had no language in common. The Greeks were monolingual; the Jews were bilingual, but their second language, Aramaic, gave them access to Persians and Babylonians, even to Egyptians, rather than to Greeks.  
(Momigliano 1990: 81)

The Jewish texts I have examined certainly owe a great deal to the ideas and culture of ancient Mesopotamia. The debt to Babylonia is acknowledged by

many contemporary Jewish scholars, and the impact of Babylonian ‘science’ on a religious and magical discourse should not be underestimated. The Jews of antiquity, influenced by Babylon, were concerned not only with spirituality but also with ‘*Wissenschaft*’. Bottéro shows evidence of scientific thinking in early Babylonia, using divination as his model. He suggests that

it is wrong to reserve divination for Mesopotamia and science for Greece . . . (for) in Mesopotamia itself, from very early and long before the Greeks, divination had become a scientific type of knowledge and was, essentially, already a science. What may have been passed on to the Greeks was this scientific point of view, scientific treatment, and the scientific spirit. Consequently the Greeks did not develop their conceptions of science, which we inherited, out of nothing; in this important point, as well as in others, they owe a debt to the ancient Mesopotamians.

(Bottéro 1992: 125)

Bottéro shows how deductive divination (i.e. dealing with *factual* sequence and consequence), as opposed to inspired divination (i.e. revelation from the gods), was an invention of universal and rational moment, an invention that arose from intellectual exertion. These cognitive abstractions resulted in paradigms, if not principles, which were used as the basis for manuals that taught a logical way of thinking. The usual bias, challenged by Bottéro, is illustrated in this passage:

Mere observation is not science. This is clear when we inquire as to the use which the Babylonian astronomers made of their records. Whereas the Greeks in a single century discovered the true cause of eclipses, the Babylonians never even attempted to find a rational explanation. They employed their data for purely astrological purposes. If an eclipse had once been followed by a war with Elam, a war with Elam was foretold from its recurrence.

(De Burgh 1963: 30)

Even though the Treatises of the Babylonian manuals are not argued in formal, logical mode, but are casuistic in character, dealing with ‘variable elements of the same object . . . real or imaginary . . . observed or *a priori*’, they provide a deductive cue for the *a priori* facts: they ‘show the general idea from a particular angle’.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the Babylonian Talmud itself is fashioned thus, often following in this tradition of debate, discussion, deduction and derivation of syntagma from the paradigm case.

Finkel has argued that because duplicates of clay tablets showing several examples of medical ‘tracts’ have been excavated, there was probably some kind of medical school in Babylon during the sixth century BCE. Equally interesting is the fact that simultaneously, and very close by on the same site, tablets of

magical ‘tracts’ were excavated. Finkel has shown that the Babylonians wrote inscriptions for medical recipes on long rectangular tablets, while the inscriptions for magical recipes are written on tablets that are shorter and square in shape. This suggests that there may have been a division of labour between the roles of the ‘scientific’ medical student and his teacher (*asu* or healer) and the magician (*ashipu*). At any rate, it would appear that the Babylonians distinguished between a ‘scientific’ potion and a concoction used in sympathetic magic.<sup>19</sup>

These Babylonian ideas and practices provided the basis for the repertoire of ‘medical’ recipes and ‘magical’ interventions in Talmudic lore.<sup>20</sup> Even though distinctions may have been drawn between ideas of miracle, medicine and magic, according to Talmudic belief there is a divine link between a physically normal occurrence (birth), a clearly miraculous notion (resurrection), and a feature of the natural world (rainfall):

Three keys are in the hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, and are not entrusted to the hand of any messenger: the key of childbirth, the key of the revival of the dead and the key of rain.

(Ta’anit 2a)

A similar formula is found written on an amulet, the ‘keys’ in this case being named as ‘The key of sustenance, the key of birth, the key of rain, the key of graves’.<sup>21</sup> The writer of the amulet was probably a spell-writer Rabbi-cum-magician, who was able to call upon and utilize the power of God through the services of the angel Gabriel.

### **The rise and fall of Babylon and Judaea**

Traditionally, Abram (later Abraham), the patriarch of Israel, had his origins in Ur of the Chaldees, Chaldea being another, antiquated name for southern Babylonia. Although Abraham crossed (*avar*) the Euphrates river to enter the land of Canaan, and was therefore called *Ivri*, a Hebrew, he would have brought with him the influence of the culture and ideas of Babylon and these are reflected in much of the early scriptures that described and portrayed the patriarchal era of c.1900–1600 BCE. This influence was reinforced c.593 BCE during the era of the Babylonian exile.<sup>22</sup> The prophet Ezekiel experienced his visions in exile on the banks of the River Chebar, a tributary of the Euphrates. His vision became the inspiration for a quest into the mysteries of the Creator and his Creation that led, via Talmudic elaboration and a separate and esoteric literary *oeuvre*, to the development of mediaeval kabbalistic thought. The Babylonian Talmud was written and finally collated in Babylonia over a period of around 600 years, approximately 150 BCE to CE 500. The many precepts contained in both the scriptures and the Babylonian Talmud are those by which Jews have lived their daily lives for around two thousand years, and their Babylonian inspiration is evident.

The ancient Hebrew peoples were divided into twelve tribes with a priestly tribe, the Levites, from whom the *Kohanim*, the Priests, originated. According to the Hebrew scriptures, an established Kingdom, with David and his son Solomon as the most notable kings, existed around 1000 BCE. Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem in 953 BCE. The dynasty of the southern Kingdom of Judah began with Saul, who ruled from 1033 to 1013 BCE, until Zedekiah, who ruled from 597 to 586 BCE.<sup>23</sup> Another dynasty, the Kings of Israel, ruled the northern kingdom, which disappeared when Assyrian forces conquered the ten tribes of that territory. This invasion of the kingdom of Israel by Tiglath-pileser III in 745 BCE, and the conquest of Samaria by Sargon II in 723 BCE, led to the deportation of the ten 'lost' tribes of Israel. Roaf mentions how, 'as an instrument of government, Tiglath-pileser pursued large-scale deportations and resettlements of peoples, recording 155,000 Chaldeans and 65,000 Medes as deportees'.<sup>24</sup> According to de Lange

An inscription of Sargon mentions 27,290 deportees from Samaria in 721 BCE and this figure must represent only a fraction of the Israelites resettled in northern Mesopotamia and further east during the Assyrian conquests, their place being taken by settlers from Babylonia and Syria.

(de Lange 1985: 22)

The Assyrian Empire (883–612 BCE) collapsed under the onslaught of a coalition of Medes, Scythians and Babylonians. The neo-Babylonians ruled from 612–539 BCE during which time, under their king Nebuchadnezzar II, they once more waged war, this time to the west, in Syria, Judaea and Egypt.

The Babylonian conquest of Judah (Judaea) in 586 BCE is described in the Second book of Kings chapter 25:

And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about. So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land. Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war [fled] by night by the way of the gate between the two walls . . . and the king went by the way of the Arava. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army was scattered from him. Then they took the king, and carried him up to the king of Babylon . . . and they gave judgement upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon.



The Temple of Solomon was razed, the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed, and most of the people of Judah were taken into captivity. 'But the captain of the guard left of the poorest of the land to be vine dressers and husbandmen'.<sup>25</sup> Neusner writes: 'To keep the populations of the polyglot empire mixed, the Babylonians resettled other peoples in the land'.<sup>26</sup> Talmon mentions the changes in the social structure of Israelite society, particularly in terms of leadership and interaction between priests, the king and the prophets. He emphasizes 'the transformation from the pre-exilic . . . nation, to the post-exilic people characterized by a multicentricity which resulted from deportations and voluntary or semi-voluntary migration'.<sup>27</sup> He also refutes Weber's assumption that 'post-destruction Palestinian Jewry' became urbanized and no longer practised agriculture.<sup>28</sup>

The eastern diaspora ended when Persian forces under Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BCE and permitted Judaeans to return to their country. The Judaeans experience of diaspora in Babylon, although relatively untroubled in terms of religious persecution, was not always a happy one for the exiles who wept by the Tigris and Euphrates.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding, a large proportion of the exiles chose not to return to Judaea. Ezra the Scribe, a former civil servant in Babylon, and Nehemiah, a high court official and cup-bearer to Xerxes, returned to Jerusalem. Momigliano writes:

In political terms Nehemiah was a tyrant imposed by the Persians just as much as Histiaeus and others had been imposed as tyrants over Greek cities by the Persian government. Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem, as Themistocles had to rebuild Athens. His remission of debts had obvious analogies in Greek practice of the fifth and sixth centuries. Nehemiah's law against mixed marriages was paralleled in Athens by Pericles' legislation against foreign wives.

(Momigliano 1990: 81)

Ezra and Nehemiah organized the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple in 516 BCE, and during this period the written form of the Hebrew Bible began to take shape.

Almost 200 years later, in 331 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire and Macedonian rule extended over Judaea. Momigliano notes that not only did the Graeco-Macedonians try 'to present themselves as more sympathetic masters than their predecessors', but that 'Alexander had certainly done one thing for the Jews which proved to be irreversible. He put the majority of them into a Greek-speaking, instead of an Aramaic-speaking, world'.<sup>30</sup> For their part, the Greeks, by reason of their immersion in Platonic and Pythagorean philosophy, were able to understand and appreciate the nature of rigorously hierarchic and hieratic communities. Administrators and traders who moved to Judaea as a result of the Graeco-Macedonian conquest may have recognized that the priest-king was not far removed from the philosopher-king. Momigliano

suggests that ‘philosophers and historians looked into Jerusalem, and, on the whole, they were pleased. Judaism became suddenly known – and respectable’.<sup>31</sup> He argues that the Jews were seen as ‘descendants of the Persian wise men’ and were depicted by Greek philosophers and historians ‘both in fact and in fiction as priestly sages of the type the East was supposed to produce’.<sup>32</sup>

In 168 BCE, the strategic importance of Judaea, the strip of land lying between Egypt and the Levant, ensnared the Judaeans in the rivalry between Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria and the Egyptian Ptolemy VI Philometor. Ultimately Roman intervention saved the Egyptian forces, but what occurred in Jerusalem between 168 and 164 BCE went beyond the routine internal conflicts of the Seleucid empire. The Jewish Temple was turned into a temple of Olympian Zeus and specific Jewish practices such as circumcision and Sabbath observance were prohibited. This flagrant interference in the traditional ritual observances of another nation was not common in the Greek-speaking world, so when Antiochus IV captured Jerusalem in 169 BCE and introduced pagan worship, Judah the Maccabee raised a small band of Judaeans who resisted the might of Syria and established their independence during the period between 166 and 163 BCE. They restored Jerusalem and the Second Temple to their position of religious importance. Although there was further conflict with the Syrians, under Simon, one of Judah’s brothers, ‘practical independence was won and the yoke of the heathen removed from Israel’ in 142 BCE.<sup>33</sup> Simon was installed as High Priest in 140 BCE, and the Hasmoneans heralded the establishment of a dynasty of Priest-Kings.

Hellenistic influence had signalled the beginnings of a wider diaspora for the Jews, most of whom lived in Judaea and Babylon. Trading opportunities encouraged many Jewish merchants to travel westwards, and a cultural division developed between the Aramaic-speaking and the Greek-speaking Hellenized Jews. In addition, there was a stark contrast between the poverty of the Judaeans and the growing wealth of Babylonian Jews, who were prosperous and enjoyed the facilities of well-established academies of learning. But all was to change, for while ‘The conflict with Hellenism intensifie(d) the passion for the Law, the conflict with Rome the passion for the land and political independence’.<sup>34</sup>

The Parthian Empire had ruled Babylon from about 300 BCE and conflict with Rome later became a dominant feature of Parthian policy. After the Roman conquest of Judaea in 63 BCE, the independence gained by the Hasmoneans came to an end. Captured Syrian territory was returned and the Romans exacted severe taxes on the population. The years of oppression that ensued in Judaea under Roman domination resulted in a continuation of feelings of frustration that had been experienced under Syrian Seleucid oppression. A general atmosphere of unrest, caused by punitive taxes and the loss of independence made Judaea an unruly province. Under Judah the Maccabee, a friendly treaty recognizing the Jews as a nation had been signed with the Senate of Rome, but the Romans found that the Jews were difficult to dominate.<sup>35</sup> The Hasmonean high priest

Hyrchanus II was king by reason of his birthright. His younger brother, Aristobulus, challenged this position. In his feud with Aristobulus, Hyrcanus was supported by Herod Antipater, and after Pompey's death in 48 BCE they supported Caesar in his bid for power. Thus the political position of Hyrcanus was restored and he was named hereditary head (ethnarch) of the Jewish nation. However, the position of Hyrcanus was nominal only, for 'the government was really in the hands of the astute Antipater'.<sup>36</sup> After the assassination of Caesar, the friendship between Antony and Antipater ensured that Herod, the son of Antipater, gained the title of tetrarch. The position of Hyrcanus became even more precarious, and eventually Herod, having given support to both Antony and Octavian, 'was named by the Senate in solemn session King of the Jews'.<sup>37</sup> So the monarchy, previously held by hereditary high priests, was devolved on a layperson, Herod the Great, a Judaized Idumaeen. He was proclaimed ruler of Judaea by Roman authority and reigned from 37 to 4 BCE.

A strong popular resistance to Roman rule reached a crisis with a full-scale revolt between CE 66 and CE 74. Josephus described the state of unrest at the time:

In all districts of Judaea there was (an) upsurge of terrorism, dormant hitherto; and as in the body if the chief member is inflamed all the others are infected, so when strife and disorder broke out in the capital the scoundrels in the country could plunder with impunity, and each group after plundering their own village vanished into the wilderness. There they joined forces and organized themselves in companies, smaller than an army but bigger than a gang of bandits, which swooped on sanctuaries [that is, synagogues] and cities.

(Josephus *War*: 267)

Factional in-fighting hindered Jewish defences and Jerusalem was lost in CE 70 after a siege of almost six months. The Temple was destroyed and the fall of Jerusalem was celebrated in Rome the following year with a triumph to Vespasian and his son Titus. The mountain fortress of Masada, seized by Jewish Zealots from the Roman garrison in 66, was finally taken in 73 after a famous siege that ended when the Zealots committed mass suicide rather than surrender. Little or no support was given by Jews of the Roman diaspora for this revolt.

Following the destruction of the Second Temple, the Romans issued a ban on Jewish settlement in Jerusalem and forbade the circumcision of non-Jews in order to prevent conversion to Judaism. The taxes previously paid towards the upkeep of the Temple were now allocated to the imperial treasury. However Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai obtained permission from the Romans to form an academy of Jewish learning and legal authority in Yavneh, to the west of Jerusalem. This was the first of several academies and was the seat of the Sanhedrin, or supreme council, consisting of seventy-one members. The aristocratic Hasmoneans were now replaced by a 'spiritual nobility' who came to be known

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

as Rabbis. During the period of Roman rule, as the situation became increasingly oppressive, the desire for a 'redeemer' expressed itself as an important aspect of public and private aspiration. Between CE 132 and CE 135, a second revolt against the Romans, led by Bar Kokhba, took place. The revolt failed and Roman influence was firmly established. Thus the extension of the Jewish diaspora westwards, throughout the Mediterranean region and the Levant, was facilitated. The Pharisees, retaining the powerful position they had enjoyed among the general populace during Seleucid rule, continued to advocate strict religious observance while they led the people in mourning the destruction of the Second Temple and the consequent loss of territorial autonomy.

## LITERARY SOURCES

The texts are treated in the chronological order of accepted orthodoxy. Scriptural texts will be discussed first, followed by an overview of the Talmudic works and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The *Hekhalot* and *Merkava* texts will then be discussed, and finally the magical inscriptions on incantation bowls and amulets will illustrate and complete the work. A brief background to the development and rise of mysticism in mediaeval times and during the pre- and post-enlightenment period is also given.

### **The *Tanakh***

The Jewish Bible, the so-called ‘Old Testament’, is made up of three sections: Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographa. From the initial letters of the Hebrew words Torah, Nevi’im, Ketuvim, an acronym is commonly used to name the Hebrew Bible – the *TaNakh*, also known as the *Torah she-bikh’tav*, or the written law. The five books of the Pentateuch contain the ‘Teaching’ (*Torah*) of Moses and the story of the origins and development of the ancient Israelites. The books of the ‘Prophets’ (*Nevi’im*) trace the past and future of the Israelite people, while the various ‘Writings’ (*Ketuvim*) including the Song of Songs, Psalms and Ecclesiastes conclude the *Tanakh*.

The *Tanakh* is written in Hebrew with a few passages in Aramaic, and was set down after previously having been, in the main, transmitted as an oral tradition. The *Tanakh* was traditionally seen as a single document, and from the religious point of view, is treated as such. Secular biblical scholarship however, indicates otherwise. In 1753, Professor Astruc, of the University of Paris, put forward a theory that the use of two Hebrew names for the deity, God (in Hebrew, *Elohim*) and Lord (YHWH, Yahweh, or in Hebrew, *Adonai*) indicated that the texts had been the product of two different sources.<sup>1</sup> By the time the ‘Higher Criticism’ of the Bible had become an established discipline, its leading practitioner, Wellhausen, could claim several earlier scholars as his predecessors.<sup>2</sup> The *higher criticism* defining the authorship of the Torah may be outlined thus:

the J (Yahwist) source originated in the south among the tribe of Judah, while the E (Elohist) source came from the north, from the tribe of

Reuben. . . . Supporters of the documentary hypothesis believe that the J source and the E source were combined together after the fall of Samaria in 721 BCE. . . . Most scholars believe that the core of the D (Deuteronomic) source was associated with the law book found in the Temple in the reign of Josiah. . . . The fourth source . . . is known as P because it is thought that its author came from a priestly background. The Holiness Code in Leviticus in particular is ascribed to him. . . . Most scholars believe that the P source was compiled at the time of the Exile . . . and enabled the Israelites to survive the catastrophe of the destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE.

(Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1996: 28–34)

This approach was naturally unacceptable to those who regarded the Bible as literally the word of God, particularly since it fostered unorthodox interpretations. Ackerman shows how Robertson Smith, influenced by the German theory of Higher Criticism, offended his contemporaries by asserting that

not every part of the Bible was, or could be, literally true . . . that much of the text was intended and should be construed figuratively (and) that the typological citation in the New Testament of passages from the Old Testament did not prove that the earlier passages were prophecies that had been fulfilled.

(Ackerman 1987: 59)

An indication of the orthodox Jewish view is given by the editor of the standard Hebrew–English printed Torah, Hertz, who states: ‘My conviction that the criticism of the Pentateuch associated with the name of Wellhausen is a perversion of history and a desecration of religion, is unshaken’.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, ‘higher criticism’, or the ‘documentary hypothesis’ of Wellhausen is generally accepted by academic biblical scholars. Indeed, the very existence of a so-called ‘society’ of ancient Hebrews has been called into question, for it has been argued that the ‘society’ is a product and construct of the literature. The society itself is deemed by some never to have existed, because the ancient texts are themselves perceived merely as ‘a function of the system’.<sup>4</sup> In his essay entitled ‘On Reconstructing Israelite History’, Hayes writes:

We assume that the reconstruction of ancient history is very much a subjective enterprise. There is no such thing as the history of Israel, not even *a* history of Israel; there is only X’s or X’s and Y’s version of how ancient Israelite history may be understood. The boundary between history writing and the historical novel or fiction is neither wide nor very imposing.

(Hayes 1987: 6)

Contemporary Israeli academics too, question the relationship between the literary texts, archaeology and history. In December 1999 a symposium was held in Jerusalem on the topic of ‘The *Tanakh* as History’, under the joint auspices of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Center for Research into the History of Israel and the Yizhak Ben-Zvi Memorial Center for Research into the Settlement of Eretz Yisrael. The Ben-Zvi Memorial Center, at which the symposium was held, is attached to the erstwhile Presidential home of Yizhak Ben-Zvi in Rehavia, and is a simple wooden hut built to seat around seventy-five people. The attendance at this symposium exceeded all expectations, as around 200 people crowded into the hut, overflowing on to the verandah, and standing in every available space around the seating accommodation. The speakers were clearly held in high esteem in the world of Israeli academic research and included Professors from the Literary-Historical faculties<sup>5</sup> and the Archaeological-Geographic faculties<sup>6</sup>. On the wall above the heads of the speakers, inscribed upon a plaque, were two sentences (in Hebrew):

Thus spoke the Lord God, Behold I have taken the Children of Israel from amidst the nations and gathered them from all around, and brought them to their Land. And I have made them into a single nation in the Land.

These words express the links between God, his land and his people and represent an ideological philosophy of ‘Exile and Return’.

The content of the Symposium was to contradict almost everything that the audience probably expected to hear, especially in view of the sentiments expressed on the plaque, which resonate with faith and ideology. Surprisingly, the audience accepted the facts presented with warm applause, indicating their appreciation of serious academic research as opposed to the notions expressed in the traditional, ancient, but less reliable, scriptural texts. The archaeologists, literary scholars and historians talked of ‘words’ as opposed to ‘stones’, that is, they recognized the fact that, according to the archaeological evidence, the period of the earliest Israelite society never existed, except as described in the texts, the *miqra*. The speakers acknowledged that their research expressed views contrary to ideology, and yet they recognized that the literature itself, with its inner tensions and undoubted literary merit, nevertheless represented a literature of redemption, and was, despite the evidence of modern research, still a national treasure and a significant and unified corpus of textual and literary importance.

In examining the scriptural texts, I have adopted the anthropological gaze and tried to expose ‘the grain of the culture’, taking what may be called ‘the native view’, and have dealt with ‘biblical’ literature as a quasi-historical record.

### **The Talmud**

The Babylonian Talmud is a crystallization of an oral tradition, and is written in the Mishnaic Hebrew that was used between 400 BCE and CE 400, and Aramaic,

which was the *lingua franca* of the time. According to Jewish tradition as written in Ethics of the Fathers, *Pirqé Avot*, the two bodies of knowledge, the Tanakh and the Talmud, were transmitted by God to Moses on Mount Sinai and the tradition was then passed on from generation to generation by sages and rabbis as an oral heritage. A typical page of the Talmud comprises a large, central section surrounded by various commentaries. A precept of the Torah is discussed in the *Mishnah* (meaning ‘repetition’) and from this precept the *halakhah*, or practical rule of ritual or civil law, will be decided in the detailed discussions. These commentaries, written in Aramaic and called *Gemara* (meaning ‘completion’), represent many ‘conversations’ between rabbis who may have lived within a 600-year period. Various opinions are preserved, in order to obviate futile debates in the future. The last opinion recorded is generally taken as the one that stands. The Academies in Palestine (Tiberias, Sepphoris, Caesarea, Usha) and in Babylon (Sura, Pumbedita, Nehardea) engaged in intensive research and study of the laws of the Torah, and the Rabbis travelled between the two centres, creating an environment for dialogue, discussion and interchange of opinions. Talmudic commentary continued throughout the early mediaeval era and Rabbinic commentators have continued to interpret and re-interpret the law.

The codification of the *Mishnah* was completed by Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi around CE 200 in Bet She’arim, Palestine. The six divisions of the *Mishnah* – *Sedarim* or orders – contain sixty three tractates, or *Masekhtot*. Each tractate is divided into chapters, of which there are five hundred and twenty three, further divided into paragraphs. The Orders of the *Mishnah* cover all aspects of daily life:

- *Zera'im* – (literally ‘seeds’) – Laws connected with agriculture
- *Mo'ed* – (literally ‘season’) – Sabbath and festivals
- *Nashim* – (literally ‘women’) – Laws concerning relationships between men and women
- *Nezikin* – (literally ‘torts’) – Damages and other civil legislation
- *Qodashim* – (literally ‘sanctities’) – Holy offerings and dietary laws
- *Taharot* – (literally ‘purities’) – Purity of Temple and home.

Two hundred years after the codification of the *Mishnah*, the Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud, the *Yerushalmi*, was edited in Tiberias and Caesarea by Rabbi Yochanan, Resh Lakish and Rabbi Elazar. Between CE 500 and CE 600, Rav Ashi and later, Ravina, edited the Babylonian Talmud, the *Bavli*, and although this redaction is regarded as the authoritative summary of the law, there are slight variations in different redactions of the Talmud.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to *Halakhah*, the Talmud contains writings called *Haggada*, or *Aggada* – narration – comprising legends and stories about biblical personalities, theological speculations or parables, as well as *materia medica* and mystical writings concerning the Vision of Ezekiel. The *Yerushalmi* contains fewer folios



than the *Bavli*, but contains more sections of *Aggada*. Closely linked to Talmudic texts are texts of the *Midrash* which were used as a method of Rabbinic teaching, obtaining meanings from biblical verses that operated on a symbolic level instead of relying on the simple literal meaning. *Midrash* interprets a biblical text according to its contemporary relevance.

### Dead Sea Scrolls

The Scrolls were found in 1947 in caves immediately to the west of Qumran, which is situated on the north-west coast of the Dead Sea. It is assumed that the scrolls, thought to have originated in the Essene community that could have lived at Qumran, were placed in the caves for safekeeping from Roman attack. They had been hidden there for almost 2,000 years, preserved by the arid climate, and had sustained damage mostly as a result of vermin infestations. Although only eleven more or less complete scrolls exist, there are almost 600 fragmentary scrolls.<sup>8</sup> For the expert scholar the few words on a fragment are identifiable, but the task of matching pieces of the fragments to make a continuous document remains a daunting challenge.<sup>9</sup>

The textual material in the scrolls constitutes the books of the *Tanakh*, other compositions on biblical and non-biblical themes ('Apocrypha' and 'Pseudepigrapha'), and 'sectarian' scrolls that represent the beliefs and rules of the Qumran sect. Every book of the *Tanakh* is represented, with the exception of the Book of Esther. The significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls lies in their existence as pristine Hebrew manuscripts dating from the late Second Temple period, written by Jewish authors who lived during that time. Prior to the discovery of the scrolls, the earliest Hebrew biblical manuscript dated from the tenth century, so the scrolls are important because they prove that the later documents remain virtually unchanged from these much earlier examples of the Jewish bible. The scrolls also contain valuable evidence of a breakaway Jewish sect that developed during the transitional period between early biblical times and the rabbinic era. These Dead Sea texts describe various apocalyptic groups whose teachings enlarge our knowledge of the growth of Jewish mysticism as well as Christian apocalypticism.<sup>10</sup> In particular, the 'sectarian' scrolls describe the way of life of the Qumran community. The Essenes, in the Damascus Rule, give the history of their origins as being almost 400 years after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, that is, around 140 BCE. A 'Teacher of Righteousness' led the breakaway sect into the so-called 'land of Damascus' after a serious rift with the Temple authorities over details of observance and piety, and a new 'covenant' was declared. The continuing conflict is described in other Essene manuscripts, and it is possible to date some events because the names of Queen Shlomzion ha-Malka, the widow of Alexander Jannai, who reigned from 76 to 67 BCE, and Hyrcanus who served as High Priest from 76 to 67 and again from 63 to 40 BCE, are mentioned.

The finds from Qumran have been the source of great controversy. Those

fragments and near-complete scrolls which were studied by Israeli palaeographers and biblical scholars were published and displayed soon after discovery. However, those sections of the find that were housed in the Rockefeller Museum in East Jerusalem, which, until 1967 was in Jordan, proved to be a source of contention. The Christian scholars were, in general, not as well-versed in Hebrew or the minutiae of Jewish law as were the Jewish scholars, and were unable to publish their work so rapidly. The chief editor of the 'Jordanian' Dead Sea Scrolls admitted: 'The text I'm working on now is of course full of law. And the thing that really delayed me from finishing that work was knowing that I was incompetent to deal with that side of things'.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, some scholars were allocated certain sections of fragments and would not allow other scholars near their 'hoard'. A scandal erupted in the early 1990s when clandestine photographs of the Rockefeller scrolls were made available to an American scholar and published soon afterwards. Several new translations of the scrolls have been published, but work still continues on identifying, matching and deciphering fragments.

### ***Hekhalot and Merkavah texts***

Although the Talmud is usually regarded simply as a repository of learned debates on law and custom, occasionally enlivened by anecdotes about the lives of the Sages (Rabbis) and their lineages, it also contains material of an esoteric nature.<sup>12</sup> A section of Talmudic material that was intended for a very limited audience offers information regarding the Act of Creation, *Ma'aseh B'rêshit*, and the Divine Chariot, *Ma'aseh ha-Merkavah*. The 'Act of Creation' literature describes exactly how God created the universe, the world, his own celestial kingdom, the angels, man and the rest of creation. A separate branch of this genre exists outside the Talmudic sphere in the Heavenly Hall, or *Hekhalot* literature.

The inspiration for both the Talmudic and non-Talmudic literature on the Divine Chariot (*Merkavah*) and the Heavenly Halls (*Hekhalot*) is the biblical Book of Ezekiel. The first chapter of Ezekiel describes his vision of a radiant chariot descending from heaven in a fiery cloud. In the centre of the radiant amber, or electrum,<sup>13</sup> were four winged creatures (the *chayyot*) with the figures of humans, but each with four faces. The faces were fronted with human features, but on the right-hand side of all four, the face was that of a lion, on the left-hand side the face of an ox, and all four had the face of an eagle looking backwards.<sup>14</sup> Each had two separate pairs of wings, with human hands beneath the wings. These wings made a sound like that of rushing water, 'like the sound of Shaddai, (i.e. God himself) a tumult like the din of an army'. Scholem contends that these creatures were 'angels who form an angelologic hierarchy at the Celestial Court'.<sup>15</sup> He argues that the texts of the

Greater and Lesser *Hekhalot* . . . are not *Midrashim*, i.e. expositions of Biblical passages, but a literature *sui generis* with a purpose of its own.

... the vision of the celestial realm which forms their main theme originally proceeded from an *attempt to transform what is casually alluded to in the Bible into direct personal experience.*

(Scholem 1946: 46 [emphasis mine])

The transformation of a biblical allusion into a personal encounter with the numinous is demonstrated by Talmudic stories of certain Rabbis of the first century CE who experienced transcendental visions concerning the Divine Chariot. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and his disciple, Rabbi Eleazar ben Arakh, were engaged in a conversation about the Creation, when they were interrupted by angelic presences, singing trees and the sudden appearance of flames of fire.<sup>16</sup> Scholem suggests that during the time of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai a legendary circle of initiates existed; these writings, the 'Greater' *Hekhalot*, *Hekhalot Rabbati*, show both Palestinian and Babylonian influences, but Scholem maintains that the origin of most mystical tracts was Babylonia, whence they were later disseminated in Italy and Germany.<sup>17</sup>

Only the initiated scholar was able to acquire knowledge of the celestial heights, and only the Rabbi, himself an initiate, could decide to whom to reveal this knowledge. Scholem writes that 'in the period of the Second Temple an esoteric doctrine was ... taught in Pharisaic circles', while Steinsaltz writes that 'the various Essene sects were apparently influenced by their secret teachings'.<sup>18</sup> The Talmudic dogma states that 'one should not teach the Act of Creation to two, or the Divine Chariot to one, unless he is wise and understands by himself'.<sup>19</sup> A rabbi would choose a single disciple and pass the knowledge on to him exclusively. Scholem has postulated that from this musing on the nature of creation, a type of gnosticism developed in Judaism that indicated an intellectual separation between the demiurge and the God worshipped in the synagogues. God is both *Yotzer B'rêshit* (the origin of creation) and *Ha-Melekh Ha-qadosh* (the holy king).

The initiate, sometimes called a 'mystic', would purify himself and, with the use of 'a magic seal made of a secret name which puts the demons and hostile angels to flight', ascend through the heavens and describe what he saw.<sup>20</sup> Not only is ascent extremely dangerous, but re-entry to earth is equally fraught with terrible, fiery hazards. 'In order to make their heavenly ascent, these mystics followed strict ascetic disciplines, including fasting, ablution and the invocation of God's name'.<sup>21</sup> In this ecstatic trance, the Sage could ascend through the seven heavenly halls to the divine chariot. The given dimensions of the halls are beyond human comprehension and the gates to the halls are manned by large cohorts of guardian angels who sing a celestial liturgy exalting the holiness of the king of heaven. The liturgy of the synagogue is an echo of these angelic songs.

Since Scholem's ground-breaking work on mystical texts appeared almost fifty years ago, modern scholarship has progressed apace; however, the scholarship is concentrated mainly on translation and clear exposition. There seems to

be very little enquiry as to why this *genre* evolved. When I asked Elior this question, she related it immediately to the loss of the Temple; there was a need to replace the earthly court of the Temple with a heavenly court.<sup>22</sup> The king was the same, only his residence had altered. While this is no doubt true, it may also be the case that the rabbis, surrounded by the foreign culture and scientific achievements of Babylonia, were attempting to match this spirit of enquiry. *Gnosis* was engaged in the same quest as *scientia*, and might borrow its methods and discoveries in the Rabbinic attempt to render a ‘scientific’ explanation of the origins of the cosmos.

### **Magic bowl texts, magic spells and amulets**

My introduction to the *genre* of magic bowl texts came as a result of attending a course on ‘Medicine in the Babylonian Talmud’ at University College London. At the outset, the course followed the study of ancient medical remedies of the privileged, private and sacred context of the Talmud. A radical paradigm shift then took place as we moved to the study of texts that described the exorcism of demons in the public context of healing and magic. It was, nevertheless, later revealed to be a logical step.

The Aramaic incantations of Late Antiquity found on amulets and in magic bowls date from the fourth to the seventh centuries of the current era. Scholars of ancient Greek magic are familiar with the Egyptian magical papyri, and the Aramaic incantations belong to this tradition, while incorporating the magic of Babylonia and Assyria, so that a debt to the science of Babylon is again found in Jewish literature. There is also, however, a clear link between several Assyrian texts and Talmudic texts, and Geller has demonstrated how closely certain Talmudic medical texts follow the Akkadian recipes.<sup>23</sup> The methodology for such study is as follows: a Talmudic text is compared first with several Talmudic variations of that text, and then with transcriptions of Akkadian or Sumerian inscriptions on clay tablets. Such work is painstaking and, like the contemporary work on mystical texts, concentrates on the linguistic aspects of decipherment and accurate translation. Geller’s expertise in deciphering and translation of Aramaic incantations has coincided with the donation of around 700 Jewish magic bowls to University College London, (the Schøyen Collection).

Most incantation bowls have been excavated in Mesopotamia and Iran and are simple earthenware artefacts on which an ink inscription has been concentrically written, spiralling around the inside of the bowl. Bowls have been found, in the main, at the thresholds of dwellings, buried upside down, in order to trap demons underneath. Hunter has translated Mandaic and Aramaic bowls from Nippur, where two Mandaic bowls were found in a courtyard of a large house, randomly buried down-turned as usual, together with two Aramaic bowls.<sup>24</sup> As a rule though, the bowls were found at the threshold of houses, and the houses are thus deemed to have been inhabited by Jewish ‘clients’. However it is not always clear from names of clients in some bowls that they were, in fact, Jewish.

Metal amulets were inscribed by cutting the texts into the surface of metal with a sharp point, and, according to Naveh and Shaked, the amulets

were designed to be folded, rolled into a narrow strip, and inserted into a container . . . also made of metal, which could be worn as a phylactery on the body of the owner, or placed in a private house or synagogue, possibly by suspension.

(Naveh and Shaked 1987: 14)

Amulets were also written on materials such as potsherds, and although parchment, papyrus and cloth were also probably used, only one cloth amulet appears to have survived. According to Naveh and Shaked the inscriptions on metal (gold, silver, copper or lead) amulets were used ‘to ward off the powers of evil, to heal people, or to gain the love of a person. The common Babylonian practice of the same period was to write incantation texts on earthenware bowls’.<sup>25</sup>

Naveh and Shaked acknowledge the link between *Hekhalot* texts, the Jewish Liturgy and magic spells on these artefacts, and some of the material to be discussed below is based on their research into documents from the Cairo Genizah as well as bowls and amulets from Babylonia and Palestine. Shaked emphasizes that the [Jewish] ‘magicians, to judge by the crude way in which the texts on some bowls are written, (were) humble technicians of the sorcery which they had learned to perform, and had little skill in the literature from which they were quoting’. However, other Jewish spell-writers who ‘could make use of the soaring language of the *Hekhalot* texts when they composed a spell’ were familiar with the texts and were obviously selling their secret knowledge of an esoteric body of magic letters and names to their clients.<sup>26</sup>

The Rabbis believed that the Torah contained answers to all questions and the core of the synagogue liturgy was based on texts from the Jewish scriptures. Themes and ideas used both in the liturgy and in incantation texts show how the knowledge and use of these specifically biblical or Talmudic references were intended to mirror the influence and authority vested in the omnipotence of God. The accurate and skilful transference of *Hekhalot* material and elements of the Jewish liturgy into incantations was clearly the work of highly educated people.

However, the efficacy of a phrase in an incantation could well have given rise to the use of the same phrase in prayer.<sup>27</sup> Abusch has shown convincingly, using Babylonian material, how this reversal sometimes occurred in Babylon. The *ashipu*, or exorcism priest/magician was engaged to dispel witchcraft in a complicated ritual involving fire, water, washing and anointing, and his appeals were to the gods of the Sun and Moon, and gods of the celestial and netherworld. Abusch demonstrates how ‘incantations or parts thereof were fashioned into *Gebetsbeschwörungen* by being modeled on a standard prayer type’.<sup>28</sup>

When Mauss wrote that ‘Prayer is speech’, his analysis of prayer led him to conclude that ‘A rite only gains its *raison d’être* when one has discovered its meaning . . . the beliefs to which it corresponds. . . . Prayer is precisely one of

these phenomena where ritual is united in belief'. He suggests that the 'short and sparse formulae and chants of a magico-religious nature' eventually take over the 'whole ritual system'.<sup>29</sup> He acknowledges that although rites were first collective activities, he contends that religious practices are now, in general, individualized actions. He points out that 'we sometimes see the most spiritual prayer degenerating to the point of becoming a mere material object: the rosary, the prayer-tree, the prayer-wheel, the amulet, phylacteries, *mezuzoth*, miraculous medals . . .' etc.<sup>30</sup> Mauss contracts the significance of prayer to

a series of words whose meaning is determined, and whose order is approved as orthodox by the group. Its value is that given to it by the community. It is efficacious because the religion declares it to be so.

(Mauss 2003: 34)

The textual sources discussed above are thematically and ideologically linked to differing cosmological and taxonomic 'spaces'. The divinity is described as situated in his glorious kingdom, the place of holiness and worship. The scriptural and Talmudic texts reflect the divine, yet are rooted in an earthbound sacred service, where the holy words were constantly read and re-read in daily life. The magical texts encompass both the numinous and the day-to-day tribulations of ordinary people. The mystical texts serve as a nexus, mediating between the two cosmic elements, and demonstrate the difficulty of declaring a simple, 'cut and dried' separation between ideas of magic, religion and science where those categories are not fixed rigidly within the reigning cultural assumptions or popular worldview.

### **Later development of mystical ideas – *Kabbalah* and *Hasidism***

In Spain during the late thirteenth century, a set of documents appeared, written mainly in Aramaic and with some Hebrew, purporting to be the work of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who lived in Roman Palestine during the second century CE. These manuscripts, available to a privileged and specified readership, were the work of the thirteenth-century writer Moshe ben Shem Tov de Leon and also, it is thought, members of his circle in Guadalajara. The manuscripts relied on the magic and mystery invested in words contained in Merkabah literature and other Kabbalistic texts of late antiquity. Through this major work, the *Zohar*, a persuasive and complicated set of concepts regarding aspects of the Godhead was disseminated throughout Europe. The central theme rests on aspects of God's power, majesty, wisdom and sanctity. Kabbalistic lore spread through western Europe and, by the seventeenth century, the tradition was available to Jewish communities before the Enlightenment (*Haskalah*).

Indeed, there were and still are, centres of Kabbalistic thought where Jewish populations exist and have remained consistently from ancient times. Dubnow reminds us that

the founders of practical Kabbalah had all walked in the ruins of Safed, Hebron and Jerusalem: R. Joseph Caro, the Ari [R. Isaac Luria], R. Moses Cordovero, R. Hayyim Vital and their followers. . . . Finally, at the end of the eighteenth century, the hasidic movement reached Erets Yisrael to prostrate itself at the tomb of its ancient mother – practical kabbalah.<sup>31</sup>

(Barnai 1997: 378)

The central notion of Kabbalah (meaning ‘that which has been received’) is a portrayal of aspects and attributes of the Godhead represented by the *sefirot*. The ten *sefirot* are: *keter*, *hokhmah*, *binah*, *hesed*, *gevurah*, *tiferet*, *netzah*, *hod*, *yesod* and *malkhut*. The direct translations are: crown, wisdom, understanding, mercy, judgement, beauty, eternity, glory, foundation and kingdom.<sup>32</sup> God is said to have created the world through the ten *sefirot*. The word has the root *s-p-r*, and is related to ‘sapphire’, the same sapphire pavement that is first mentioned in Exodus and appears in the Halls of Heaven beneath the throne of God. The root also signifies the words ‘radiance’, ‘number’ and ‘tell’ or ‘express’. The ‘shining’ or *Zohar*, is the literary mirror of the brilliant nature of the *sefirot*. God’s light has the potential to fill the world, and in aspiring to Godliness, the Kabbalist attempts to restore the absence of light by his good deeds. Thus the idea of a personal redemption through holiness is extended to the universe as a whole, where *tikkun olam*, the correction or amelioration of the world, becomes possible through human efforts. This corrective process is undertaken, according to the Kabbalah of R. Isaac Luria (1534–1572), in order to facilitate the return of God to his world whence he had withdrawn during the creation. This divine concealment, a process of mystical ‘contraction’ known as *tzimtzum*, left mankind to combat the *klippot*, or husks of evil that constantly interfere with human existence. *Tikkun olam* can be effected by the actions of men and women particularly in the performance of ritual acts such as the daily prayer ritual with phylacteries (*tefillin*) and the lighting of Sabbath Eve candles as the prelude to Sabbath observance.

I shall not give examples of Kabbalistic texts, but will instead discuss briefly the phenomenon of Kabbalistic diagrams, which are textual in themselves. The diagram has been presented in many ways, such as a tree of life, or sets of concentric circles, as well as the traditional candelabra, *menorah*, and geometric figures. Perhaps the most famous Kabbalistic illustration is that of a diagrammatic human body where the attributes, *sefirot*, of God’s creative, dynamic characteristics are assigned to various parts of the body.<sup>33</sup> Another of the sefirotic diagrams shows the chariot, *merkavah*, at the centre, with Michael the Archangel surrounded by the four creatures of the chariot, the lion, bull, man and eagle. Surmounting the diagram is the creator Himself. Yet another variation is of the Temple in Jerusalem representing the four ‘worlds’ of existence: the supernal, or divine, and the physical, psychological and spiritual areas of man’s existence. The Temple itself encapsulates the four, where the area



between the cherubim above the Ark is the supremely divine, the Ark itself the lower part of the divinity, while the ranking of High Priest, priests, Levites and Israelites represent Divinity, spirit, soul and body.

The pietistic philosophy of *Hasidism* developed in the ensuing years and incorporated mystical and magical traditions. Indeed, variations on the magical texts found on bowls and amulets were used in their original forms and were also elaborated upon in mystical texts for healing and protection. *Ba'al Shem*, or 'Master of the Divine Name', describes one who by means of his knowledge of the secrets of the Tetragrammaton could utilize amulets and spells, performing healing rituals and working miracles. The Ba'al Shem Tov, or BeSht (1698–1760), emphasized an individual redemption, which then would *allow for the redemption of the world*. The BeSht was an adept of Kabbalistic and mystical works and used their themes in his own preaching and writings.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav (1772–1811), whose name is revered in certain communities to this day, was one of the great mystical Rabbis of the eighteenth century. The great-grandson of the BeSht, his credentials as a *tzadiq*, a righteous man, stem not only from his descent from this prestigious ancestor, but from his own reputation as a scholar of Hasidism. His tomb in Uman (Ukraine) remains a site of annual pilgrimage for his followers. Rabbi Nachman's very name is utilized on a variety of amulets, where the principle of lengthening or shortening a name or phrase as used in the magical spells of late antiquity (discussed in Chapter 9) can be seen in a popular amulet adorning vehicles and buildings in Israel. The root 'na', meaning 'to travel' is the basis of the amuletic formula, which reads 'NA, NACH, NACHMA, NACHMAN, ME-UMAN', the last word implying that his protective power is that of an 'expert' in these matters, as well as indicating the location of the tomb. The invocation of Nachman of Bratzlav's name is a plea for a safe journey and the desire for good fortune.

Another example of the reliance on ancient amulets occurs where compilations of traditional spells and blessings are set out on laminated cards that employ verses and words in specified designs, using particular symbols. These are widely available for purchase in Israel and are used principally as amulets in newborn babies' rooms or on cradles. They mention, *inter alia*, the patriarchs and matriarchs and the Talmudic angels. Other transformations of ancient texts, symbols and magico-mystical symbols are purposely included in 'antique' printers-block-setting-case designs that contain special objects and prayers for blessing the home. Another symbolic artefact taken from ancient sacrificial rites is the red thread worn by adherents of Kabbalah, which harks back to the scarlet thread used in certain sacrificial ceremonies in the Temple.

Evidence of rabbinic reliance on Talmudic remedies when dealing with the sick and the suffering is given in Daniel Meijers' fascinating paper on the treatment of jaundice in modern Israel.<sup>34</sup> Simon Dein has described how a London Rabbi counted thirty-two threads of a ritual fringe on a prayer-shawl (*Tallit*), associating and comparing them with the painful teeth of the owner, in another instance of healing by utilizing the magic and mysteries of Hasidic thought.<sup>35</sup>



The white cock of Kappara (repentance) is also used by modern Hasidism to generate money for charity. A cardboard cut-out of the cock is posted through the letter-box in Israeli homes between Rosh Ha-Shana and Yom Kippur, the ten days of penitence, with a small collection box attached for donations. The white cock is polysemic, being reminiscent of the ceremony of sacrifice, or of swinging a chicken about the head of the penitent in supplication for forgiveness of sin. The white cock also appears in magical incantations, while tradition has it that charitable donations will avert the severe decree of death at the time of divine judgement that takes place during the ten days of penitence at the beginning of the Jewish year. The symbols are thus agglomerated at this time of heightened religious tension.

Idel writes of the conjunctions of mysticism and magic during mediaeval times, and notes the emergence of an ecstatic philosophy that, continuing its influence on Jewish thought, culminated in the development of Hasidism. He writes that ‘mystical experiences stem from an intimate connection . . . a direct contact with God . . . designated in some extreme cases as *unio mystica*’.<sup>36</sup> This is reminiscent of the ‘drawing near’ of the *qorban* of the Torah texts, and the *imitatio dei* of the Merkava mystics. The existence of ‘practical Kabbalah’ or magic, in mediaeval Spain, is acknowledged as ‘stemming from direct divine revelation that had taken place in the past and still continued in the present’.<sup>37</sup> Idel elucidates the fusion of messianic ideas with mystical notions as revealed in an epistle of the BeSht. By means of an incantation (*hashva’ah*, or mystical oath) the BeSht experienced an ascent of the soul and in this famous letter, specific mention is made of his vision of the Messiah.<sup>38</sup>

Idel emphasizes the Kabbalistic foundation of the mystical messianism of Hasidic beliefs and its redemptive function in society. He refrains, however, from comparing the activities of Kabbalists who lived during the Middle Ages with personalities like the BeSht, who lived centuries later. In this he echoes the project undertaken here in which there is a ‘primary purpose of pointing to the existence of a main magical interest in certain segments of the Jewish elite . . .’<sup>39</sup> and the continuity of the tradition is clearly revealed. Idel provides a synthesis for the understanding of these facts: ‘Only the coexistence in Jewish mysticism of a variety of mystical paradigms can explain how hasidism was able to put back into circulation a whole range of mystical concepts . . .’.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the most visible contemporary charismatic leader was the eminent Hasid, The Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson. His followers ensure that his writings and moralistic stories are disseminated world-wide.<sup>41</sup> The mystical attributes of God thus continue their influence upon the thoughts of those who rely on the Kabbalah and Hasidism in their daily lives. These examples show how the traditions and ideas contained in the different textual sources discussed are themselves the bearers of constructs and signifiers that have resonated within the minds of the actors throughout many centuries.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

W. Robertson Smith (1889) and Frazer (1890) initiated the anthropological study of biblical lore, but this line of research was subsequently neglected until Schapera (1955), Douglas (1966), Leach (1969), Pitt-Rivers (1977) and Lewis (1987) examined several biblical texts. Durkheim, although he was the son and grandson of rabbis, preferred an oblique approach to religion, by way of the 'elementary form' of Australian aboriginal customs, even if (as I shall argue) his account was deeply imbued with Jewish religious assumptions. Lévi-Strauss, also the grandson of a rabbi, believed that his methods for the analysis of myth could not be applied to edited, written texts. Yet it was his structuralist approach that became most influential as Biblical anthropology was revived. Leach drew on Lévi-Strauss's structuralist perspective in the analysis of biblical stories and ancient Jewish religious practices, and Douglas has published ingenious structural analyses of the books of Numbers and Leviticus.<sup>1</sup> Cooper (1987) and Zohar (1987), both with the advantage of being familiar with Biblical and Talmudic sources in the original Hebrew and Aramaic, have published structural analyses of beliefs and rituals described in these ancient texts. Goldberg and Eilberg-Schwartz have, in introductory chapters to their work, given comprehensive surveys of the field. The former has explored the notion of 'culture as text', and the symbolic significance of ritual, while the latter has concentrated on the dismantling of the 'opposition between savage and civilized traditions'.<sup>2</sup>

Those anthropologists who have treated ancient Judaism have, however, generally limited themselves to biblical texts. I have been engaged in an examination of a textual tradition spanning early and late antiquity in a way that is different to other scholarly treatment of the same texts, and have erased, so to speak, the boundaries and margins of difference established by convention and tradition. Some of these texts are not generally regarded as being part of the same literary heritage, but they all show how ideas of holiness and ritual purity were the underlying features that bridged the gaps between seemingly unrelated ritual activities. Venturing beyond most anthropological excursions into this territory, I shall examine a range of texts that are part of the Jewish literary heritage of early and late antiquity, including not only the Pentateuch and Talmudic texts, but also the literary output of the Qumran community,<sup>3</sup> the esoteric works of

rabbinic mystical creativity, material found in the Cairo Genizah<sup>4</sup> dealing with health and healing, and the incantation texts of Babylonian magic bowls. In the process I shall also move beyond what is conventionally considered to be the Jewish religion, treating ‘magical’ practices that many regard as the very antithesis of religion. Indeed, I have found it necessary to question the distinction normally made between the concepts of ‘magic’ and ‘religion’.

### **Magic and religion as *scientia***

From the time that Frazer expounded his theory of the ‘movement of higher thought . . . from magic through religion to science’, anthropologists have put forward arguments about the ‘development’ of human societies through these three ‘stages’ of belief in the possibility of manipulating natural laws or materials to the benefit of humankind.<sup>5</sup> Tambiah asserts that ‘the anthropologist’s unquestioned task was to find out where and why the primitives had gone astray’.<sup>6</sup> Tambiah’s synthesis of the arguments reinforces the idea that magic, science and religion are separate entities, easily identifiable in particular cultures.<sup>7</sup> He takes the traditional view of the biblical attitude to magic, and writes of ‘the relentless ban on “magic” (as a form of causal action to manipulate God)’ and regards magical activity as the equivalent of idol worship.<sup>8</sup> But the existence of other gods and pagan magic is acknowledged in the Hebrew Bible, and the magic utilized by Jewish authors of incantations and spells does not rest in appeals to idols or pagan entities. The magic of the Talmud and other Jewish texts generally utilizes a form of the name of the Jewish god himself and the names of his angels as agents of efficacy, although occasionally *nomina barbara* are used to restrain malevolent powers or adjure heavenly forces. Shaked writes that

There is considerable affinity between the Jewish liturgical tradition, which was in the final stages of redaction in the period just before the advent of Islam, and the magic texts. At the same time there was also considerable affinity between those liturgical texts and the *Hekhalot* literature.

(Shaked 1995: 204)

This suggests that it may not be easy to distinguish systems of ‘magic’ or ‘philosophy’ or ‘rational logic’. The Jewish tradition is not easily deconstructed into disparate elements. It contains many facets, including cosmology, faith, ritual, philosophy, myth and magic, and an investigation of natural law is part of Talmudic discussion, although it is included only so far as it impinges on the particular case being debated.

The governing belief to which everything else is subordinated, however, is the omnipotence of God, whose power is in the word. The Pythagorean hypothesis of the reducibility of everything to numerical form does not feature in this debate. Mathematics is replaced by literature; all things originate from, and can

be reduced to, letters, in early Hebrew philosophy. Because the Hebrew god is so all-encompassing, he is perceived as being the ultimate and only source of everything. He himself is the only 'it is' and likewise, 'coming-to-be' emanates directly from him.

The work of the *Yotzer B'réshit*, the 'prime mover' or 'Bringer-forth of the Work of Creation' who made the universe in which we live, is initially described quite simply and in a matter-of-fact style in the well-known biblical Genesis story. Later writings in the Talmudic period, however, tell another, separate story, a 'big-bang' theory created by the Babylonian and Palestinian Rabbinic Sages of two thousand years ago. This theory is based on the sanctity of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and names. The power that is held within the frame of a single name, that of God Himself, particularly when written in the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (*ha-shem ha-meforash* – the special name) is the key to the superhuman power of divine creation itself. This same power can, however, be extended to human acts of magical healing and exorcism. The Tetragrammaton, the ineffable, not-to-be-pronounced Name of God, YHWH, is the prime example of this belief in a sanctified, potent name. All the texts written in the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, from Talmudic tractates to Aramaic inscriptions in magic bowls, to the powerful texts of *Hekhalot* mysticism, rely on the immanent power resting within letters and names; indeed, the concept and existence of an institution such as the *Genizah* is, in itself, a product of this reverence for the innate potency and sanctity of certain written words.

I have explored notions of *gnosis*, *scientia* and *Wissenschaft*, and despite the fact that there is no equivalent term in biblical Hebrew, this does not mean that the desire for knowledge and an aspiration towards 'knowing' does not lie at the heart of the enterprise that inspires these texts. The word *Torah* means 'learning' and *Talmud* means 'study'. The pursuit of knowledge is the aim of Torah-study and Talmud-study; indeed, the pursuit is regarded as 'a positive religious duty . . . of acquiring learning and wisdom, study which is its own end and reward'.<sup>9</sup> Encapsulated within the word 'torah' is a sense of cognitive impact. The scholar 'knows' things. In order to practise Talmudic exegesis, a full knowledge of the Torah is a necessary preliminary requisite. Talmudic study often uses the extrapolation of a general principle from an abstract concept as the solution to a problem. No topic is regarded as too unusual, obscure or bizarre to be studied, so all-embracing is the quest for knowledge. Disciples would study the behaviour of their masters to acquaint themselves with accepted norms. A disciple of R Abba (Rab), concealed himself under the bed of his great teacher, to learn how he behaved with his wife:

R Kahana went and hid under the bed of Rab. On hearing Rab discoursing and joking with his wife, [Kahana] said [to Rab]: You would think that Abba's mouth had never before 'tasted the dish'. Rab said to Kahana, 'Kahan, are you down there? Get out – this is disgraceful!'

[Kahana] said to [Rab] ‘My lord, it is *Torah*, and I have the need to learn.’

(Berachot 62a)

Here the word *Torah* is imbued with the sense of ‘general knowledge’, or facts that deserve to be studied, while the word *Torah* is also used specifically to indicate the Five Books of Moses.

A brief example of the discursive nature of Talmudic discourse (taken from the first chapter of the tractate Ta’anit 18) demonstrates how the discussions of the Sages were not limited just to rules and regulations of seeding and harvesting, tithing or sacrificial offerings, but had a scientific bent. The primary subject matter here is the nature of the water-cycle and the ‘flying clouds’. A description is given of the origin of clouds, different types of rain that precipitate from different types of cloud, as well as whether the rain showers are heavy or light and how they penetrate the earth. Then, moving in comparative mode, the discussion describes a journey that Rav Ulla made to Babylon from Palestine in the third century CE; Rav Ulla, impressed by the wealth and productivity of the Babylonian community, comments on how a wonderful basket of honey-dates, which were plentiful and cheap, cost him only a ‘zuz’ – a coin of low value; but he then comments immediately that unfortunately, he passed a ‘troubled night’, severely disturbed by gastric problems; the ‘basket of dates for a zuz’ is re-labelled a ‘basket of knives for a zuz’. We are informed thus about several disparate things: the journeys made by Rabbis to and from Babylon, the wealth of the Babylonians compared with the relative poverty of the Palestinians, a quick comparison of the weather conditions and agricultural produce of the two countries, the nature of clouds coming from the sea or other directions, and meanwhile, the terse wit of Talmudic humour is clearly demonstrated, in five short lines.

Lloyd gives credit to the Greeks for their second-order questions and procedures resulting in proof, but he also shows how as scientists they were

not just optimistic, but hopelessly over-sanguine, to imagine that the problem of the elementary constituents of physical objects, let alone all diseases, would soon be brought within the compass of scientific knowledge and control.

(Lloyd 1990: 71)

Here lies the great chasm between Greek and Hebrew thinking; the Greek thought he could know everything and would consequently be able to control everything, whereas the Hebrew thought that only his god, numinous and omnipotent, could, and did, control everything in the universe.

### The *Weltanschauung* revealed by the texts

The worldview emanating from Rabbinic thought is marked by the opposition of order, *seder*, and disorder, *irbuvya*. These constructs are set within three earlier, scripturally defined oppositional entities: Heaven, *shamayim*, the Earth, *ha-aretz*, and the Netherworld, *She'ol*. God, eternal, invisible and omnipotent, exists outside and beyond the boundaries set by these clearly defined entities and the natural world or universe is constrained by a complicated set of constructs. God is 'ecto-cosmic', transcending his creation, governing it timelessly. He is supernatural, having created heaven and earth from the desolate waste and unformed void, *tohu va-vohu*. This original world, like the Garden of Eden, 'as it was created', *ke-vriatan*, is untouched by human endeavour, the essence of uncultured and uncultivated nature, but because it was created with the assistance of *chokhmah*, Wisdom, it functions according to the will of God. He himself lives in the supernal area of the seventh heaven, seated upon a Throne of Glory and surrounded by the souls of the righteous, the holy *hayyot*, *serafim* and *ofannim*, who bear the Chariot upon which the Throne rests.

As soon as men and women bring their ingenuity to bear upon the animal and plant worlds, the potential for confusion, *irbuvya*, exists. So the mixtures of seeds, fabrics or animal types, known as *kil'ayim sha'atnez*, is prohibited. States of ritual purity and impurity impinge upon the bodies of men and women, and in order to maintain good order, the state of purity is the preferred option. The status of ritually pure, *tahor*, and the ritually impure, *tameh*, can apply to people, animals and objects. These prohibited things, 'mixtures' and the ritually impure, hold the potential for anomaly or ambiguity, wherein lie the dangerous areas of demonic intrusions and superstitious practice, *darkei ha-emori*, the 'ways of the Emorites'. Included in these 'ways' are the practice of idol worship and acknowledgement of 'other gods' – *elohim acherim*. The conceptual abode of these practices is *Ge-hinnom*, the sinister valley of Hinnom, which has three entrances. One entrance is clearly marked by the smoke-filled area between two palm trees in the valley itself. The other two exist somewhere in the endless waters of the Sea and the vast wastes of the Desert, where roads cannot be marked off, mapped or remembered in ordinary ways.<sup>10</sup> So the Garden of Eden becomes diametrically opposed to the Valley of Hinnom, and the place where the Tree of Eternal Life flourishes, and the Tree of Knowledge grows, has its counterpart in a hellish zone of idolatry and superstition.

Opposed to the world of sooth-sayers, diviners, sorcerers, necromancers and spell-binders is the realm of the *qadosh*, the holy. Intrinsic to the *qadosh* is the idea of Order, *seder*, as embodied in God's law, the Torah. Torah is disseminated first in the Temple, later in the Synagogue. The Sabbath, the Festivals and the Sacrifices are the bases of the Ordered system. The Rabbis devise the *Halakhah* (the 'way' to conduct oneself) to maintain the Order, the prayers are organized in a *Siddur*, the Mishnah is conceptualized in six 'orders', *shisha sidrei mishnah*, the 'shas'. Miracles and magic from God oppose the work of the

*darkei ha-Emori*. Finally, there is a *brit* or Covenant between God and his people that prescribes monotheistic worship, circumcision, Sabbath observance and possession of the Land of Canaan.

### Sacrificial rites and prayer formulae

The essence of Israelite sacrifices may thus be adjudged as ceremonies of ‘drawing close’, of offering valued objects or as a way of manipulating fate. This contrasts with other types of sacrifice as described in anthropological literature. Hubert and Mauss expanded on Robertson Smith’s thesis of sacrifice as sharing a meal with the deity, and they analysed the transformation of the devotee

who provides the victim which is the object of the consecration (and) is not, at the completion of the operation, the same as he was at the beginning. He has acquired a religious character which he did not have before, or has rid himself of an unfavourable character with which he was affected; he has raised himself to a state of grace or has emerged from a state of sin. In either case he has been religiously transformed.

(Hubert and Mauss 1964: 9–10)

This is not dissimilar to the ideas described in Levitical sacrifices, and which Hubert and Mauss use as exemplars in their work.

De Heusch developed the theory whereby a social transformation was effected by a social activity. The social order is renewed as the cosmological order is restored.

The *nueer* condition is specifically a disorder in the social body which manifests itself in an attack on the integrity of a physical body either of the guilty person or of his close kin. . . . The ideal (sacrificial) victim is an ox . . . The life of an animal is thus substituted for that of the sacrificer at the scene of the sacrifice.

(De Heusch 1985: 8)

So, in short, while Hubert and Mauss emphasized the connection between the sacred and profane and the divine and the mundane, De Heusch analysed the social implications of communal disorder and the resumption of normal social relations after the sacrifice. ‘The sacrificial victim is the agent of metamorphosis. Thanks to the animal victim, the possessed person rediscovers a marginal identity. He also reorients himself in space by running towards the four cardinal points’.<sup>11</sup> Time and space in the here and now are the central features of these analyses.

The central idea behind Israelite sacrifice, however, was encapsulated in the concept of *qorban* – drawing close to the deity. While the Temple stood in

Jerusalem and while some semblance of Jewish autonomy existed, sacrifice of animals was the central ritual act. When the Temple was destroyed, prayer became the central rite, but prayer rituals were carefully arranged to take place at those times when sacrifices would have been offered, so the new 'sacrifice' was described as 'of the lips'. The Eighteen Benedictions, a prayer that has its origins during the fourth century BCE, begins with a 'performative utterance', a convention generally utilized as the introduction to an incantation, from Psalms (51:17): 'O Lord, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise'.

Despite the efforts of priests, prophets and rabbis to separate the ordered, public religion, regarded as 'set in stone', from the dangerous yet attractive tradition of seemingly extra-religious spell-writing for the purposes of engendering protective influences, blessings and healing and, in some cases, curses and harm, these customs were very much part of everyday practice in dealing with misfortune or the unknown. The imposition of categories such as 'religion', 'mysticism', 'magic', 'science' or 'medicine' upon the great volume of written material under consideration has resulted in a false separation of the many different rites from the matrix which served as the inspiration and source of a central system of symbols and symbolic behaviour patterns. Why should the action of laying hands upon a beast, which was soon to lose its life as a sacrificial offering, be considered any less magical than devoutly murmuring ritualized prayer formulae or, indeed, casting an unbaked clay tablet into a fire with a devout wish for the 'sympathetic' and associated passionate inflammation of a beloved's heart with love for the lovelorn? The clearly symbolic value, as concepts, of sacrificial offerings, prayers or magical praxes is highlighted by the juxtapositioning of these actions as cultural constructs in the central argument of this book.



## SANCTUARY, TEMPLE AND SYNAGOGUE

### Jewish sects; magic and magicians

#### **The Sanctuary in the wilderness, the Temple in Jerusalem**

Several sources discuss the ‘Temples’ of the single God: the texts of *Tanakh* give details of the main sites of worship – the mobile Tabernacle in the wilderness, Solomon’s Temple and Ezekiel’s visionary description of an idealized Temple of the future. The Mishnah and Josephus provide details of the Temple during the Second Temple period, while the Dead Sea document known as ‘The Temple Scroll’ illustrates the heightened purity rules that governed the worship and practices of the Qumran community.

All these texts take for granted that the single God required sacrifices to be offered to him. Abel was killed for his knowledge that God preferred a sacrifice of flesh over one of agricultural produce, Noah built an altar and sacrificed ‘clean’ animals and birds after the flood had subsided, and Abraham was prepared to immolate his own son but instead used the ram substituted by divine providence, all in order to honour God.<sup>1</sup> However, these types of sacrificial offering should be distinguished one from another, because they hint at things to come. Cain and Abel voluntarily wished to offer something of God’s bounty back to him. Noah, having survived the dangers of the flood, gave free-will thanks to God with a sacrifice of ‘pleasing odour’, while Abraham, in obedience to God’s instruction, demonstrated his pure devotion to God’s will. These sacrifices may thus be classified as ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ offerings. The tenor of the sacrificial offering changed radically when, after the exodus from Egypt, the children of Israel were told to construct the *mishkan*, Tabernacle, or *miqdash*, Sanctuary in the wilderness. The sacrifices to be offered were still categorized as voluntary or involuntary, but the reasons for offering various substances were carefully classified.

The technical description of the building of the *mishkan* is given in fine detail, and the texts in the Book of Exodus explore the minutiae of almost every part of God’s dwelling-place in the wilderness. High places, *bamot*, were used as places of worship and sacrifice both before the construction of the Tabernacle and in the land of Canaan after the Israelite conquest. Altars on *bamot* were forbidden during the years of wandering in the wilderness, but after the conquest of

Canaan, temporary sanctuaries were built at Gilgal and Shiloh. The Ark containing the Tablets of the Law was lodged at Shiloh, however following the Israelite defeat by the Philistines, the Ark was captured and remained in enemy hands.<sup>2</sup> Mysterious afflictions then struck the Philistines so they surrendered the Ark to the Israelites. It was left to David to bring the Ark to Jerusalem when he had captured the town from the Jebusites, and he named Mount Zion and its surrounds 'The City of David'.<sup>3</sup> King David built himself a palace of cedar-wood, while the Ark was lodged in a Tent. According to tradition, King David said to his son Solomon:

My son, I wanted to build a House for the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and fought great battles; you shall not build a house for My name for you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight. But you will have a son who will be a man at rest, for I will give him rest from all his enemies on all sides; Solomon will be his name and I shall confer peace and quiet on Israel in his time. He will build a House for My name; he shall be a son to Me and I to him a father, and I will establish his throne of kingship over Israel forever.'

(I Chronicles 22: 7–10)

With the Temple built in Jerusalem, the *bamot* were forbidden as places of worship.<sup>4</sup> The First Temple was a *bayit*, a house for God, and was erected by Solomon around 960 BCE as a royal chapel, adjoining the palace. The Temple was very like the *miqdash* in the wilderness in terms of the furniture and vessels used in ritual worship. Just as the *miqdash* in the wilderness was holy, so too was the Temple and the ground upon which it stood, and the most holy area where God himself was deemed to dwell was the Holy of Holies, the *qodesh qodashim*. After the Persian conquest of Babylon, Cyrus permitted the exiled Judaeans to return from Babylon, and Zerubabbel rebuilt the Temple around 515 BCE. This Second Temple was reconstructed and restored by Herod in 20 BCE but in CE 70 it was razed by the Romans. The practice of sacrifice itself had long been under scrutiny, for in Proverbs we learn that 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; But the prayer of the upright is His delight'.<sup>5</sup>

The memory of the Temple ritual remained influential on rabbinic writing. Various Talmudic tractates provide detailed descriptions of the role of the priests, the elements of their services, and rules for upkeep of the various buildings in the Temple precinct.<sup>6</sup> But the significance of the Temple was not merely one of ritual and service. In the second century CE, long after the destruction, Rabbi Samuel the Small expressed the symbolic relationship between the world and the Temple through a reference to the human body. He said that the world itself was like an eye; the white represented the ocean, the iris was the earth, the pupil, at the centre of the eye was Jerusalem, and the image held within the pupil was that of the Temple.<sup>7</sup> The centrality of the Temple and Jerusalem, not only to

the world of Jewish thought, but also to all human bodies, is demonstrated in this existential Talmudic vision, which is both physical and metaphysical.

Two other significant and equally detailed texts describe the Temple, but because they symbolize an idealized era, they are invested with a quality of the fantastic.

Ezekiel's lengthy catalogue of measurements, dimensions and proportions are at variance with the details given for building the original Temple. His vision portrays an era in which the Judaeans and their priestly leadership will have returned to original Eden. A *nasi*, a prince not a king, would lead the Temple services with the Zadokite priests, and the sons of the prince would continue in this tradition. As the Paradise of Genesis was the source of a life-giving river, so the holy of holies, *qodesh qodashim*, encircled by the platform of the Temple buildings, would provide the source of a stream that would flow eastwards from under the Temple precinct, and feed into the surrounding fields, watering a profusion of fruit-bearing trees, a life-giving contrast to the 'thorns and thistles' promised to Adam and Eve.<sup>8</sup> The water from this stream

flows into the Arava [wilderness of Judaea]; and when it comes into the sea, into the sea of foul waters [the Dead Sea], the water will become wholesome. Every living creature that swarms will be able to live wherever this stream goes; the fish will be very abundant . . . and everything will live wherever this stream goes. Fishermen shall stand beside it all the way from En-Gedi to En-Eglaim; it shall be a place for drying nets; and the fish will be of various kinds . . . like the fish of the Great Sea [the Mediterranean]. But its swamps and marshes shall not become wholesome; they will serve to [supply] salt. All kinds of trees for food will grow up on both banks of the stream. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail; they will yield new fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the Temple. The fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.

(Ezekiel 47: 7)

Later rabbinic themes surrounding Temple and Torah have their roots in Ezekiel's idealized picture. The Temple and God's Torah laws are the source of all nourishment and healing, both physical and spiritual. The stream overcomes the aridity of the wilderness and is a source of fertility and re-birth. The return to this Eden-like state and God's approval would come about only if idolatry and immoral behaviour ceased. God's own mark would be placed on Jerusalem, for 'the name of the city from that day on shall be "The Lord Is There" – *Adonai Shammah*'.<sup>9</sup>

The Qumran community had denigrated the existing Jerusalem Priesthood and its ceremonial, believing that everything concerned with the Second Temple was a degraded variant of an original pre-exilic and perfect version of God's holiness as represented in his Temple. The Qumran laws of purity were extreme,

rendering Jerusalem and its surrounds a city of austerity, asceticism and, particularly on the Sabbath and High Holy Days, an area in which normal human bodily functions should never be performed.

### The synagogue and its liturgy

The Greek word 'synagogue' has the same meaning as the Hebrew *bet kneset*, that is, a place where people gather together, or House of Assembly. A synagogue in Judaea or in the diaspora was very different from the Temple in Jerusalem, for above all, no sacrifices under priestly supervision took place there. Moreover, a synagogue could be built anywhere, rather than on a special, sacred site as the Temple had been, although if possible, a synagogue should be built either on elevated ground or near a body of natural water. Yet a synagogue was also very different to pagan places of worship. There were no statues of divinities to be found in a synagogue. Graven images could not be worshipped, displayed or manufactured.<sup>10</sup>

The rabbinic authorities in the Yavneh academy created a new form of ceremonial worship, adapted from the Temple service, for use in the synagogue. The times of prayer corresponded to the times of sacrifices, and a liturgy was created that included descriptions of the sacrifices in the prayers.<sup>11</sup> Talmon argues that 'there is no indication that the transfer from sacrifice to prayer in post-exilic Judaism resulted from a conscious and determined substitution of the one for the other . . . it must have been a spontaneous and uncontrolled process'. He also argues that the absence of instructions both for the act of prayer and the content of the prayers themselves were 'in glaring contrast to the plethora of statutes . . . pertaining to sacrificial worship', and that there seems to have been 'an opposition to committing prayers to writing'.<sup>12</sup> However, the prophet Hosea was convinced of the efficacy of prayer when he wrote: 'Instead of bulls we will pay the offering of our lips'.<sup>13</sup> The dissenters of the Qumran community echoed this concept when they pronounced their written prayers and psalms to be 'offerings of the lips'.<sup>14</sup> When groups of Jews gathered for worship, public emissaries who knew the prayers by heart would recite them aloud so that the congregation could pray in unison; but well before they became congregational leaders, rabbis were available to answer questions on matters of law, ritual and custom. Wigoder writes that 'prayer was defined as a substitute for sacrifice and was called "the sacrifice of the heart"<sup>15</sup> and that '[t]he Jew went to the Temple to seek forgiveness for his sins; he went to the synagogue to offer his personal supplications and to listen to expositions of sacred literature'. But the synagogue was also, according to Wigoder, 'a multi-purpose institution, serving as a communal centre as well as a place of worship'.<sup>16</sup>

Wigoder writes that the 'Talmudic rabbis attributed the beginning of regular services to the men of the Great Assembly, the supreme religious institution of the post-exilic era'.<sup>17</sup> He emphasizes the fact that unlike the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel, who had been deported 150 years earlier in 722 BCE,

the exiled tribes of Judah did not assimilate into the surrounding population and that 'the most widespread and probable theory is that (the synagogue) was a product of the Babylonian exile'.<sup>18</sup> The Rabbis, wishing to establish an authoritative institution, declared that the synagogue had been founded by Moses. This opinion was held during the first century CE and both the historian Josephus and the New Testament mention it; 'For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues'.<sup>19</sup>

Synagogues existed in Judaea during the Second Temple period both in Jerusalem and in other centres. A Mishnaic passage relating to the Festival of Tabernacles tells of a Rabbi who celebrated the Water Drawing ceremony 'between sacrifices in the Temple and prayers in the synagogue'.<sup>20</sup> The synagogue excavated at Gamla on the Golan Heights is the only known urban synagogue dating from the Second Temple period and was probably built in the late first century BCE or the early first century CE.<sup>21</sup> Some of the earliest synagogues discovered in Israel are dated to between the second and third centuries CE and Levine writes that 'the earliest literary sources which mention (the synagogue) stem from the first century CE, and describe the synagogues of that period in Palestine and throughout the Roman Diaspora'.<sup>22</sup> Josephus provides evidence for a district synagogue, and communal unrest at the site:

The Jews in Caesarea had a synagogue alongside a piece of ground belonging to a Greek citizen. This they had repeatedly tried to acquire, offering many times the real value. Scorning their requests, the Greek further insulted them by beginning to build a factory right up to the dividing line, leaving them a narrow and utterly inadequate passage. The immediate result was that the more hot-headed of the young men jumped in and interfered with the builders.

A representative of the Jewish community attempted to stop the building-works by bribing the Roman procurator, but the Roman simply took the money and left the district. Josephus continues:

The next day was a Sabbath, and when the Jews gathered in the synagogue a Caesarean partisan had placed a chamber-pot upside down at the entrance and was sacrificing birds on it. This infuriated the Jews, who felt that their Law had been violated and the site desecrated. The steadier, gentler people advised an appeal to the authorities; the quarrelsome element and youthful hotheads burned for a fight.

(Josephus *War*: 150)

The earliest reliable reference to a diaspora synagogue comes from third century Egypt, where an inscription found at Schedia, fifteen miles from Alexandria, cites the dedication of a Jewish place of prayer to Ptolemy III; but many excavations show that synagogues existed in the diaspora by the first century CE. It is

clear that the importance of the synagogue grew after the destruction of the Second Temple.

### **Jewish sects during the Talmudic period**

The emergence of the group of men classed as ‘Rabbis’ or ‘Sages’ took place against a background of social change and political upheaval in Judaea. A description of the society and social conditions that gave rise to the creators of aspects of the Talmud is contained in the classical texts that deal with Judaea during the second century BCE. Four Jewish sects are delineated: Hasidim, a pious congregation that disappeared during the Hasmonean era (152–63 BCE), while three groups emerged, probably in the Maccabean times of the early Hasmonean era, and are known as Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes. Of these three, only the Essenes could be described as separatists, in the sense that they regarded themselves as ‘the only true Israel and separated themselves fully from contact with their fellow Jews’.<sup>23</sup> Several other Jewish sects existed during the Second Temple period including Early Christians, Ebionites, Samaritans, Zealots and Sicarii, some of whom were described by Josephus in *The Jewish War*. The Qumran community, thought to be the Essenes, produced an original body of literature and this documentary evidence indicates that they differed radically from the Pharisees and Sadducees in Jerusalem.

#### ***The Sadducees and Pharisees***

The Sadducees (*Zeduqim*) are thought to have been so named as successors of Zadok, the high priest during the period of the Davidic monarchy. They were wealthy and aristocratic, being both landed gentry and successful merchants, and were more attracted to Hellenistic ideas than were the Pharisees, the *Parushim*, who emphasized spirituality with strict doctrinal observance. The Sadducees did not observe the minutiae of the Oral rabbinic tradition and concentrated only on the Scribal tradition, the written Torah. They believed neither in heavenly reward nor in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the dead, nor in the existence of spirits and angels, which were all elements of the Pharisaic doctrine. Josephus wrote that

The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers; and concerning these things . . . great disputes and differences have arisen among them.

(Josephus *Antiquities* XIII. x. 6)

Rivalry between the Sadducees, and the Rabbis, or Pharisees, emerged around 150 BCE, during the time of the Hasmonean priestly and royal dynasties. Because the Hellenistic way of life appealed to the Sadducees, this engendered fierce opposition from the rabbinic authorities. The ordinary people, *ammei ha-aretz*, supported the Rabbis, while the priestly aristocracy had distanced itself from the commoners. Rabbis were familiar with the everyday trials and tribulations of the people, and were more open to daily contact with the communities that they served. The Priestly tribe had traditionally relied on allocations of land from the other tribes and on tithes and gifts from the populace, whereas the Rabbis had to work in order to eat.<sup>24</sup> In addition to acting as mediators in the sacrificial cult, the Priests blessed the people and acted as judges and teachers. Priestly duties had included a quasi-magical and oracular role involving the mysterious 'lights and perfections' the '*urim and tummim* which only the High Priest used for obtaining oracular knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

In replacing the Priests, the Rabbis functioned as authorities in all aspects of daily life because Pharisaic Judaism now made provision for the maintenance of the civil and criminal legal system, for jurisdiction on ritual purity and impurity of bodies, clothing and household wares, as well as whether certain persons, objects or edible domestic animals or birds were *kasher*, ritually legitimate, proper and 'fit', or *pasul*, disqualified, blemished and 'unfit'. These strict categories of 'perfect' or 'defective' were embodied in the Talmudic dicta known as *halakhah* – the correct way in which daily life was to be pursued. It is as if the already strict categories of 'sacred' and 'profane', and ritual purity and impurity, originally imposed to maintain a separation between the Children of Israel and the other inhabitants of the Land of Canaan, were intensified by the Rabbis in order to create another, metaphysical, boundary once the actual boundaries of Israel and Judaea had been breached and overrun by alien forces.

### *The Essenes*

Pliny the Elder described the Essenes as 'a solitary race . . . (who) live without women, renouncing all sexual love'. They had no use for money, and lived an ascetic existence on the shores of the Dead Sea, 'with only the palm trees for company'.<sup>26</sup> In fact, excavation of the Essene graveyard of around 1,000 tombs has yielded not only male but also a few female skeletons. (The graves were arranged to lie north–south, that is, oriented towards Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup>) It is thought that the Essenes were healers, as the name *As'ya* (*As'utu* in Akkadian) means thaumaturge or physician. Vermes has postulated a connection between the Essene community and a community called the Therapeutae, (healers, or worshippers) who were a celibate group, existing at the same time as the Essenes and who lived in Alexandria, Egypt. However Kottek comments that although 'Philo left us details on a sect that had close links with the Essenes, the Therapeuts . . . the writings left by the Qumran sect offer no documentation on



medical and therapeutic knowledge'.<sup>28</sup> Nor, in fact, is the name *Essene* once mentioned in sectarian scroll literature.<sup>29</sup>

The scrolls found in the caves near the ruins of Qumran include descriptions of a community with a 'covenant', a manual of discipline, which linked them ideologically to the Jews who had returned from Babylon. They saw themselves as continuing an unbroken tradition of writing documents in biblical style, but they had their own calendar based on a solar year and did not follow the traditional lunar calendar of the Sadducees and Pharisees. They also developed a liturgy and order of Temple service that was peculiar to their ascetic view of themselves as the 'righteous remnant' that had returned from Babylon. The Rabbis had decreed that prophesy had ended and divine inspiration no longer influenced Jewish thought, and so the canon of the Hebrew scriptures was a closed book. The Qumran community, however, perceived their own writings as sacred. Talmon has postulated, on the basis of these writings, that four distinct epochs were delineated in Qumran scrolls: the generations who lived before the destruction of the First Temple, in the 'primary' time (*qetz ha-rishonim*), the time of the later generations who built the Second Temple (*qetz ha-dorot ha-acharonim*), the 'latter' i.e. contemporary, Qumran era (*ha-qetz ha-acharon*), and finally, the era of the twin Messiahs of David and Aaron during the 'end of days' (*qetz acharit ha-yamim*).<sup>30</sup> In contradiction to Weber's assumption that 'inner-worldly asceticism' was a Christian innovation, Talmon also stresses that the discoveries at Qumran show how celibacy and monasticism had roots 'in the Judaism of the second century BCE'.<sup>31</sup>

The Essenes considered themselves to be 'a living sanctuary of holy men (who) could render a more efficient ministry of atonement than animal sacrifices, offered by an unclean priesthood'.<sup>32</sup> By obeying strict rules of behaviour and paying great attention to ritual purity, the community hoped to bring about, through these mystical means, a time when the enemy would be driven from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, a time when the battle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness would take place. Indeed, messianic themes also occur in Rabbinic literature and this messianic yearning was thought to be a product of the oppression of Roman rule. However, new data as well as intensive textual research seems to indicate that far from being a late, short-lived phenomenon in Judaism, Apocalypticism is a phenomenon which 'should be dated to the sixth century BC. Indeed, the first strains of apocalyptic dualism and eschatology arise . . . with the decline of classical prophecy in the sixth and fifth centuries BC'.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Rabbis, or Sages*

The destruction of the Second Temple in CE 70 caused the decline and fall of Sadducee influence, the extinction of the Zealots at Masada, and the disappearance of the Qumran community. The Pharisees and their rabbinic successors were left to transmit the heritage of what has become known as 'normative



Judaism' with its emphasis on ritual purity and strict interpretation of laws. The Pharisees insisted that the body of Oral Law formed a natural and equally sacred part of the Law as received *in toto* on Mount Sinai by Moses. Because of their intense study, scrutiny and observance of the Laws contained both in the written Torah and the oral tradition, the Pharisees were called 'Rav' or master. This form of address then became 'rabbi', and the rabbis were recognized as authorities in the interpretation of law and doctrinal observance. Those Sages who lived and worked during Mishnaic times, that is between 150 BCE and CE 200, are known as the *Tanna'im*, or Scholars. The Rabbis who lived between CE 200 and CE 500 are known as the *Amora'im*, or Interpreters, and they lived, in the main, in Babylonia.

Following the First Jewish Revolt and the destruction of the kingdom of Judah, Jerusalem and the Second Temple, the land of Judah (Judea) was renamed. Seeking to eradicate any memory of Judaeian claims, the Romans named the territory 'Palestine' after the ancient land of the Philistines. After the Second Revolt (CE 132–135), Jerusalem itself was renamed *Aelia Capitolina*. The Romans left Judaea a wasteland and many references in the Talmud compare the wealth of Babylonia with the poverty of Palestine. Research has suggested that Palestinian Rabbis were more in touch with the common people, *ammei ha-aretz*, and 'several Palestinian sources depict Palestinian Rabbis and non-Rabbis dining and partying together'.<sup>34</sup> They addressed their fellow Palestinians familiarly as 'my son' or 'my daughter', and the sources describe encounters between the Sages and members of the community in the domestic sphere, while travelling, or even in the bathhouse.

The Sages in Palestine lived in the main as had their forebears, in an agricultural setting, but many lived in the towns and cities. Rabbis earned their keep by working as scribes, physicians, clerks, merchants, artisans, blacksmiths, builders and shoemakers. While almost all Talmudic scholars were engaged in common occupations, many knew several languages, and one of the qualifications for the appointment of members of the Sanhedrin, the rabbinic council, was 'expertise in a number of sciences and in languages'.<sup>35</sup> In addition, in order to determine whether or not a magician appearing before the court was liable to the death penalty, members of the Jerusalem High Court were obliged to study magic.<sup>36</sup>

The families of several Babylonian Rabbis were involved in the silk trade and other mercantile offshoots of that trade, and were also possibly influenced by the highly stratified Persian society of the time. The Babylonian Rabbis, involved as they were with the people in employer–employee or owner–customer relationships, appear to have kept a judicious distance from members of the community. Their dealings with ordinary people took place in formal settings such as court cases, dealing with halakhic decisions or when giving public lectures.

However, the Rabbis were not members of a select tribe as the Levites and Priests, or *Kohanim*, had been. The scriptural prohibitions concerning mental and physical defects that prevented a person from taking up the priestly role were echoed in the requirements for entering the Rabbinate, but otherwise eligi-

bility to the Rabbinate was based on the ability to learn and memorize a vast storehouse of knowledge. Very few men were founders of great Rabbinic dynasties. The Rabbinate was evidently a meritocracy, which allowed the brightest stars in the field to shine in an atmosphere of encouragement and competition.

### Rabbinic learning and study

The quest for *chokhma*, wisdom, and *bina*, understanding, is the primary goal of the rabbinic ethos. Wisdom is said in the Book of Proverbs to have been made by God ‘as the beginning of his way, the first of his works of old’, that is, wisdom existed before the Creation.<sup>37</sup> Wisdom enabled God to create the world and everything in it, and his omniscience is a mystery to humankind. God, as the fount of all knowledge, constantly uses his great ‘Wisdom’, which is perceived as an embodied entity:

Wisdom cries aloud in the streets, raises her voice in the squares. At the head of the busy streets she calls; at the entrance of the gates, in the city, she speaks out: ‘How long will you simple ones love simplicity [thoughtlessness], you scoffers be eager to scoff, you dullards hate knowledge?’

(Proverbs 1: 20–2)

The attainment of *chokhma* and *bina* was, for the Rabbis of late antiquity, a pragmatic course of action. Certain aspects of divine knowledge could be used to accomplish specific goals, and learning was not, initially, considered purely an end in itself. The central importance of the Torah, the circumstances in which it was received from God at Sinai, and how knowledge of God himself is based upon knowledge of his wisdom, pervades all: ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and discipline’.<sup>38</sup>

The true rabbinic scholar had to study and understand the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) as well as practise the ethical and ritual requirements laid down by Torah law. The Torah-scholar requires forty-eight attributes:

audible study, distinct pronunciation, understanding and discernment of the heart, awe, reverence, meekness, cheerfulness, ministering to the sages, attaching oneself to colleagues, discussion with disciples, sedateness, knowledge of Tanakh and Mishnah, moderation in business and pleasure, moderation in intercourse with the world, moderation in sleep, in conversation, in laughter, by forbearance, by a good heart, by faith in the wise, by acceptance of chastisement, by recognizing one’s place, by rejoicing in one’s portion, by putting a fence to one’s words, by claiming no merit for oneself, by being beloved, by loving the Almighty, by loving mankind, by loving justice, rectitude and reproof, by avoiding honour, by not boasting of one’s learning, by not delighting

in giving decisions, by bearing the yoke with others, by judging one's fellow favourably, by showing him the truth, by leading him to peace, by being composed in one's study, by asking, answering, hearing and adding thereto, by learning with the object of teaching, by learning with the object of practising, by making one's master wiser, fixing attention upon his discourse, by quoting things in the name of their author.

(Pirque Avot 6: 6)

The catalogue indicates a required level of academic integrity and excellence, and places emphasis on maintaining a strictly regulated life-style. The true scholar would immerse himself in the specialized world of the Talmud and associate himself with the customs and methods used in the academy by the Sages. As the Priests had learned their roles through rituals and traditions, so too, did the Rabbis. 'Enculturation' or 'habitus' seem to be suitable words for this process, not unlike any other formalized rite of passage into an elite brotherhood of learning.<sup>39</sup>

Daily life and its attendant rituals would have prepared the aspiring youth for entry into the world of intensive study required for life in the rabbinic academy. Everyday sights, sounds and practices would inculcate correct individual actions. Such things as ritual washing of the hands before eating or before prayer, the correct way of performing the ritual of wearing phylacteries in morning prayer, the enunciation of the prayers themselves, the knowledge of permitted foods, permitted garments and even the times of permitted sexual intercourse in marriage, would all be absorbed as part of everyday knowledge. Being able to exercise judgements on these matters was part of the elevated role of the Rabbi.

The ability to adjudicate effectively demanded special insight where more than just comprehension and great feats of memory were required. Even more was demanded of those who would add to the body of Talmudic lore by intelligent interpretation. Because the Talmud, originally known as the Oral Law, as opposed to the Torah, known as the Written Law, was passed from master to disciple as an oral tradition, a fine memory naturally featured as a prime requisite of the *Talmidei Chakhamim*, the wise scholars. Reading and writing of the Torah were also part of the process. Listening to and repeating the texts allowed students to engage in discussion and debate. On the other hand, sickness and disease that might prevent these processes required attention and cure. Emphasis is given to treatment of fevers where the efficient operation of cognitive skills was at risk, as well as the treatment of eye ailments and potentially life-threatening diseases caused by malfunction of major organs of the body. But apart from these apparently 'natural' causes of bodily disease there were other, symbolic, hazards that could impede learning and memory, as well as the ever-present threat of demonic intrusions that 'seized' their victims and could be exorcized or vanquished only by special incantations.

### Knowledge and memory

Early in the book of Genesis we are told how Paradise was lost because the serpent tempted Eve with the possibility of acquiring knowledge by eating forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. ‘And the serpent said to the woman “God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad.”’<sup>40</sup> Eve succumbed to temptation, prefiguring humanity’s endeavour to acquire a god-like attribute of knowledge of all things. Adam and Eve both tasted the fruit because they wished to become enlightened – *lehaskil*. However, they were consigned, together with the rest of humanity, to the daily grind in order to eat and survive, while women were destined to bring forth children in painful travail. It could be said that the Rabbis aspired to regain, not the initial position of Adam and Eve, who lived in Paradise in ignorance, but the perfect existence – that of living in Paradise with knowledge, yet retaining God’s approval. An important aspect of this fable, which embodies Good and Evil in one tree, is the demonstration of God’s power over everything in creation, and particularly the fact that He is the generator of Good and Evil in the world.

The study of the Torah and Talmud is perceived as a pathway and approach towards the state of, if not *imitatio dei*, mimicry of the ways of God, then *homoiosis to theo*, actually being like God. However, this could be attained only by way of knowledge: so the tree of knowledge also signifies the way back to Paradise. In the Book of Proverbs, wisdom is likened to ‘a tree of life to those who grasp her’, while ‘all who hate me [i.e. wisdom] love death’.<sup>41</sup>

A member of the select band of initiated Rabbis who were said to have ascended in mystical journeys to the celestial realms, *pardes*, or paradise, was known as a *yored merkavah* or ‘descender in the chariot’, and had as his priority the attainment of knowledge and power given directly to him by God and the angels. This knowledge could manifest itself to the *yored merkavah* as creative ability, and it signified the aspiration for omniscience and, ultimately, the power over life and death. In *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the omniscience of the *yored merkavah* is described with special reference to those aspects of social life that had particular significance for the Sages in terms of physical defects or ritual purity:

The greatest thing of all is the fact that he (the ‘yored merkavah’) sees and recognizes all the deeds of men, even those that they do in the chamber of chambers, whether they are good or corrupt deeds . . . The greatest thing of all is the fact that all creatures will be before him like silver before the silversmith, who perceives which silver has been refined, which silver is impure, and which silver is pure. He even sees into the families, how many bastards there are in the family, how many sons sired during menstruation, how many with crushed testicles, how many with mutilated penis . . . and how many sons from uncircumcised [fathers].

(Schäfer 1992: 41–2)

God himself speaks to the *yored merkavah*, saying:

I know what you wish, my heart recognizes what you desire. Much Torah do you wish, teaching in plenitude and instructions in abundance. You expect to ascertain Halakhah [correct path of daily life], you long for the fullness of my mysteries . . . to explain prohibition and permission, to decree the impure for impure, the pure for pure, to declare the fit for fit, the unfit for unfit.

(Schäfer 1992: 49)

The dependence of the *yored merkavah* upon the assistance of his own heavenly ‘Prince of Torah’, *Sar-Torah*, was vital for his acquisition of feats of memory and other prodigious skills. The process known as *petihat lev*, or ‘opening of the heart’ is described in magical manuals, reinforcing a traditional belief that the heart is the seat of intelligence. A magical text from the Cairo Genizah reads:

If you want to perform the opening of the heart, purify yourself and take a cup of wine and say the psalm over the cup seven times and drink. Thus one shall do three times in the morning and drink, and one’s heart shall be opened. And this is reliable and tested.

(Swartz 1995: 179)

These texts portray a privileged, potential state of being that was accessible, but only to very few. The esoteric nature of the texts and the severe physical demands made upon the aspiring Sage emphasize the distance between earthly constraints and celestial powers, and render the ability to attain these heights almost impossible.

### **Rabbinic expertise described in the Talmud**

The Talmudic texts demonstrate not only how some Rabbis were themselves capable of curing others, but also how they recorded contemporary ideas about causes of illness and disease, remedies against various ailments and, in a spirit of pragmatism, were able to utilize quasi-magical practices in healing. Many Rabbis were considered to be authorities on the interpretation of omens and dreams and on ways of averting witchcraft by reciting incantations for medical cures, as well as knot-tying and other techniques of amulet production. Rabbinic praxis on earth was assumed to be a transformation of angelic praxis in heaven. The Rabbis had access to certain powers because they had mastered the study of Jewish Law, and their mastery of the Torah apparently enabled them to act in a manner that may be interpreted as a manipulation of the divine will. It was believed that a rabbinic blessing would bring fertility and rain, while a curse could bring death and drought. Certain Rabbis could create artefacts resembling man or beast and were masters of incantations and amulets. Through their com-

munication with the celestial realms, the Rabbis' knowledge of the Torah was effective enough to thwart demonic powers, and although they forbade the practice of magic by ordinary people, they themselves were acknowledged as experts in magical activities. Rabbinic prayer was efficacious because it took place at proper times within the constraints of a specific form, and this efficacy was enhanced by the ritual purity and consequent holiness of the Rabbi himself. As such, he could receive visitations and messages from the angels or communicate with the demonic world and with the dead.<sup>42</sup>

It is highly probable that Rabbis were involved in writing incantations on amulets and earthenware bowls for financial gain, which seems to indicate that Rabbis did not perceive their use of esoteric learning to be in the same class as the occult activities forbidden in texts of the Torah. Two authoritative Amora'im, Abaye and Rabba, although they often disagreed on points of the Law, concurred in the opinion that 'nothing done for purposes of healing is to be forbidden as *darkei ha-Emori*, 'the ways of the Emorites', that is, superstitious'.<sup>43</sup> The Emorites, a native tribe of Canaan, represented the antithesis of ancient Israelite belief. Their practices were associated with impurity and idol-worship and were in direct opposition to the worship of the single God and the ritual purity required for the correct practice of Judaism. The unique and distinctive power of God's Torah-teaching was peculiar to Judaism, and the acquisition of that knowledge could be used to oppose the destructive powers of demons which, coming from the others, the outsiders, were embodied either in the nations who worshipped idols, like the Emorites, or the menacing forces of Gehinnom, the zone that existed in opposition both to the Temple precinct and the environs of a synagogue, where proper behaviour was ritualized.

The protective importance and power that Torah-study and ritual purity gave to the Sage, and how that learning and maintenance of physical and mental purity contributed to the holiness of the Rabbi is illustrated in the following legend. The Talmud describes how the Babylonian sage Rabbah was studying while sitting on the trunk of a palm tree, and because his lips constantly repeated words of the Torah, the angel of death could not come near him; the wind blew, the leaves rustled, his thoughts were interrupted, but while he was dying Rabbah said 'clean, clean' – *TAHOR*. A heavenly echo went forth and said, 'Happy are you, Rabbah ben Nahmani, that your body is clean and your soul went forth in cleanness'.<sup>44</sup>

In the 'Heavenly Hall' or *Hekhalot* texts, a ritual effecting the restoration of memory clearly shows the structural transformation of a Second Temple ceremony in which the *Shekhinah* or Holy Spirit, was revealed to the assembled Sages in the *lishkat ha-gazit*, or chamber of hewn stone, where the great court of judgement, the Sanhedrin, gathered. This ritual of revelation, using the adjuration of an angel, restored the memory of a particular Rabbinic Sage, a *yored merkavah*. However, other Rabbis had to content themselves with the advice given in the traditional Talmudic texts in order to maintain or restore their memories. The *yored merkavah*, privileged by his access to numinous

knowledge, stood in contrast to the ordinary scholar in the rabbinic academy who ‘toiled with the Torah . . . with exertion and great vexation’.<sup>45</sup> In this tale from the *Hekhalot* texts, the Sage Rabbi Yishma‘el said:

Three years Rabbi Nehunyah ben Haqanah saw me in great distress and in great agony: A scriptural [passage] which I today read and learned was forgotten by me the next day. As I saw that my study had no duration in my hand, I raised myself, pulled myself together [and restrained myself] from food and drink, washing and anointment and [abstained] from cohabitation, and no singing or song came from my mouth . . . At once Rabbi Nehunyah ben Haqanah seized me, took me away from the house of my father, led me into the chamber of hewn stone and adjured me with the great seal [and] with the great oath . . . When I heard this great mystery, my eyes shone, and everything that I heard, [be it] Scripture, Mishnah, or something [else], *I no longer forgot. The world was renewed [over me] in purity, and it was as if I had come from a new world.*

(Schäfer 1992: 52)

The account of this ecstatic experience is not replicated in the Talmud, but the *Hekhalot* texts associate the capacity to retain knowledge with the time of the revelation at Sinai: ‘On his ascent to God, Moses perceived the names that guard against forgetting the Torah; the “name” likewise was revealed to ‘Aqiva so that it could be passed on to his students’.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it was suggested that ‘everyone’ could adjure an angel and ‘make use of the great mystery’ and that this mystery held the ‘secret of Torah in the widest sense, that is, everything connected to learning, understanding and remembering the Torah’.<sup>47</sup>

However, in practice these skills remained the esoteric privilege only of certain Rabbis:

He who learns this mystery, his countenance will shine, his stature will delight him, the awe of him will lie upon all creatures, and his good name will circulate in all of Israel’s places; his dreams will be pleasant to him, and his Torah will be kept within him: all the days of his life he will not forget the words of the Torah. . . . *The evil inclination will not control him and he will be saved from the spirits, demons, and robbers, from all evil animals, snakes and scorpions, and from all evil spirits.*

(Schäfer 1992: 115)

General well-being was always under threat from wild and dangerous elements, but correct behaviour could prevent any hazardous attack.

A famous Talmudic legend demonstrates the essential Rabbinic view on social conduct and learning. Two great Rabbis, Hillel (who worked as a wood-cutter) and Shammai (who worked as a builder), lived around 40 BCE. They



approached by a stranger ('heathen') who asked to be taught all of Torah *al regel echad*, literally, while he stood on one leg, that is, in the shortest possible time. Shammai, generally considered to be the more rigorous of the two Sages, and given to the strict interpretation of the law, was asked the question first, and drove the stranger off with his yardstick. Hillel, who held more lenient opinions and whose judgement is generally the one accepted in the Law, was asked the same question and replied: 'Do not do to your fellow-man that which is hateful to you. That is the whole of Torah and the rest is but a commentary. Go and learn'.<sup>48</sup> It is difficult, on the face of it, to see exactly how Hillel came to this conclusion, because the central importance of the Temple cult in Torah seems to have been ignored in his advice.

This traditional Talmudic lesson indicates that righteous behaviour is at the core of ancient Israelite and Judaeon teaching. However, much of the material contained in scripture and Talmud seems unconnected to the source from which Hillel drew his advice, namely the precept 'you shall love your fellow-man as yourself' (Leviticus 19: 18), or the related verse from the Decalogue (Exodus 20: 14) where one is forbidden to covet the house, wife, man- or maid-servant, ox and ass of one's fellow-man. Hillel's reply perhaps demonstrates how the implicit moral code was assumed to infuse all aspects of social life, even though he made no specific and immediate reference to the overt practical observance of the sacrificial cult.

### **Magic and magicians**

The Rabbis treated the problem of dealing with those who practised the forbidden arts of sorcery, enchantment and magic as a practical issue. The members of the Sanhedrin, the supreme council that dealt with legal and judicial matters, could not accept evidence provided by an interpreter, so several Rabbis were trained in the magical arts in order to determine the nature of an accusation of sorcery or divination and pass sentence on the sorcerer or diviner.

Rabbinic dicta were, on the whole, not arbitrary and were based on exegeses of texts from Torah, so the rabbinic notion of sorcery or magic was based on a distinction between several definitions that have their sources in the Pentateuch.

The laws of sorcerers are like those of the Sabbath: certain actions are punished by stoning, some are exempt from punishment, yet forbidden, whilst others are entirely permitted. Thus if one actually performs magic, he is stoned; if he merely creates an illusion, he is exempt, yet it is forbidden.

(Sanhedrin 67b)

The terms used to describe those who practised 'magic' seem to have been fairly interchangeable, particularly the sorcerer and the diviner.



Let no-one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire [in idol-worship], or who is an augur/diviner, a soothsayer, a diviner/enchanter, a sorcerer/ess, one who casts spells/charmer, consults ghosts or (consults) familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead.

(Deuteronomy 18: 10–11)

In addition, the *‘ashaf* (enchanter), was probably related to the *ashipu*, the Babylonian incantation-priest who specialized in adjurations against demons or witches. The whispered incantation, *lachash*, was associated with the *chover chavarim*, the one who cast spells. These magical practitioners may be divided into groups: (1) those who predicted the future: *qosem q’samim*, the augurer or diviner: *menachesh*, and the soothsayer: *me’onen*; (2) those who cast spells and practised sorcery: *chover chaver* and *mekhashef*; and (3) those who acquired their magical knowledge by inquiring of the dead: (*doresh el ha-meitim*) through the medium of a ghost, *ov*, or a familiar spirit, *gid’oni*.

### *Augury, divination and soothsaying*

Those who determined auspicious times for undertaking journeys or executing business transactions were regarded as practitioners of the arts of divination. According to Rabbi Simeon, the *me’onen*, the soothsayer, was ‘one who applies the semen of seven male species to his eyes [in order to perform witchcraft]’, while Rabbi Aqiva was of the opinion that ‘It is one who calculates the times and hours, saying, “Today is propitious for setting forth; tomorrow for making purchases, etc.”’<sup>49</sup> Another example is: ‘a person who seizes his staff and says “Shall I go or shall I not go?”’. The *me’onen* would make a decision that depended on circumstances such as:

so and so’s bread has fallen from his mouth; his staff has fallen from his hand; his son called after him; a raven has called; a dog has barked; there was a serpent on my right side, or a fox on my left side and his tail barred my way; a deer has crossed the road before me.

(Tosefta Shabbat 7: 12)

The *menachesh*, a ‘whisperer’, would practise the divination of good luck or misfortune by using weasels, birds and fish.<sup>50</sup>

### *Necromancy*

The necromancer mimicked the actions of the Sage who wished to ascend to the celestial realms, but in reverse. The Sage would fast for many days, ritually purify himself by immersion in a specific type of water, and would enunciate many repetitive prayer formulae, precisely recited, for the ascent to take place.

Although the necromancer would fast, he would not busy himself with prayers or study of holy texts, but instead would spend the night in the cemetery, a place of great ritual impurity, specifically so that ‘a spirit of uncleanness may alight upon him’.<sup>51</sup> It was supposed that the necromancer, having engaged and communicated with the spirits of the dead, could foretell the future. The *ba'al ov* who communed with ghosts, spoke as if from his armpit, while the *yid'oni*, the one who ‘knew’ familiar spirits, allowed the spirit to speak from his own mouth. These two types of necromancer would, according to the Law, be stoned to death.

The earliest ‘magical’ action is described as one which took place of itself, that is, as designed specifically by God. The action, *lahat*, was used to describe the flame of the sword that turns and burns eternally at the eastern gateway to the Garden of Eden, guarding the way to the Tree of Life, *etz ha-hayyim*.<sup>52</sup> Paradoxically, the same root, *l-h-t*, was then used to describe the actions of Pharaoh’s magicians, *belahateihem*, ‘with their spells’.<sup>53</sup> Another version, several verses later, uses the word *belateihem*, apparently indicating a demonic influence.<sup>54</sup> Pharaoh’s magicians were designated as *chakhamim*, *mechashfim* and *char'tumim*, wise men, sorcerers and magicians, who were able to perform magic without divine assistance. The sorcerer, the *mechashef*, was regarded as an illusionist only, that is, he actually *did nothing*, and simply gave the impression of having done something. The sorcerer, by using paraphernalia like sticks or bones, would attribute definite results to praxes that utilized specific objects. Other methods, which may have been viewed as magical, were perhaps not quite as specific regarding cause and effect and were perceived as a fantasy or an enchantment. In the book of Exodus, when Moses and Aaron use God’s power to create lice from the dust of the earth, the Egyptian magicians were obliged to acknowledge the superior powers of the Hebrew God:

(They) did the like with their spells to produce lice, but they could not. The vermin remained upon man and beast; and the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God!’ – *etzbah Elohim*.

(Exodus 8:15)

### *Sorcery and spells*

Deliberate acts of magic, those not perceived by the Rabbis as ‘illusions’, fell into this category. But what actually determined the nature of a truly magical act is never explained. The distinction appears, however, in the words used for a real performance of magic: *ma'aseh*, an event or deed, as opposed to the illusion, ‘*achazit einayim*’, literally that which was intended to ‘capture the eyes’. The problem for the Rabbis was one of boundaries: when was the enchantment from God himself, and when was it not? The Talmud gives several examples of rabbinic ‘enchantment’, some of these activities being described as ‘entirely permitted’. Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Oshaya, who spent every Sabbath eve studying

the Laws of Creation – the *Sefer Yetzirah* – would create a three-year-old calf, and then eat it, presumably in honour of the Sabbath.<sup>55</sup> Here, the ‘enchantment’ was the result of the manipulation of the creative power embodied in letters. The *Amora* Rav said of Bezalel, the craftsman responsible for much of the handiwork in the Tabernacle in the wilderness, that ‘he knew how to combine the letters by which heaven and earth were created’.<sup>56</sup>

A further example of rabbinic power is given in the description of Rabbah and Rabbi Zera dining together on the feast of Purim, when merrymaking is mandatory. They became drunk and Rabbah suddenly got up and cut Rabbi Zera’s throat. The next day Rabbah prayed on behalf of Rabbi Zera, who was resurrected. The following year, on the same feast, Rabbah asked Zerah, ‘Will your honour come and feast with me?’ Rabbi Zera, obviously fearing a repeat performance, replied: ‘A miracle does not always occur’.<sup>57</sup> So although a miracle had been wrought by rabbinic prayer, even this was recognized as not always guaranteed as a reliable outcome. Alarming evidence for rabbinic use of supernatural power is shown in the story of Rav, who was being pestered for the hand of his daughter by a man whom he considered to be an unsuitable son-in-law. Rabbi Shimi ben Hiyya could not understand why Rav did not grant the man’s request. ‘Had he been equal to Joshua-ben-Nun, [the successor of the great Moses] I would not have given him my daughter’ the Master said. Ben Hiyya retorted,

‘Had he been like Joshua-ben-Nun others would have given him their daughters, even if the Master had not given his, but with this man, if the Master will not give him his daughter then others also will not give him their daughters.’ As the suitor refused to go away, Rav fixed his eye upon him and he died.

(Yevamot 45a)

Other stories are told of Rabbis who looked at people who had offended them with a special gaze, which resulted in the offenders being turned into ‘a heap of bones’.<sup>58</sup>

The existence of a ‘continuous tradition of specifically Jewish magic (which) was well-developed in the Talmudic period’ may well provide the substance for an argument that ‘magic was a primary form of therapy and healing which was universally used by both Jews and their neighbours’.<sup>59</sup> Talmudic literature ascribes mystical powers to human magicians and sorcerers, but also acknowledges the supernatural powers of demons. The Rabbis used a general formula to exorcize demons: ‘Be split, be accursed, broken, and banned, son of mud, son of an unclean one, son of clay, like Shamgaz, Merigaz, and Istema‘ah’.<sup>60</sup> They also came up with an incantation which would dispose of the demon found in the privy: ‘Upon the head of a lion and upon the nose of a lioness I found the demon Bar Shirika Panda; in the valley where leeks grow I beat him, with an ass’s jawbone I strike him’.<sup>61</sup> These formulae bear a resemblance to spell-formulae found on magic incantation bowls and amulets. So it seems that certain Sages, as holy men initiated into the esoteric rites that allowed entry to the celestial realms,

could harness not only the forces of God's own angels, but also use more popular modes of magical incantations to overcome a malign intrusion.

One of the Sages, Ameimar, was known to have had conversations with witches. His own report illustrates his familiarity with an agent of maleficence:

The superior of the witches told me that when a person meets any of them he should mutter thus: 'May a potsherd of boiling dung be stuffed in your mouths, you ugly witches! May the hair with which you perform your sorcery be torn from your heads so that ye become bald! May the wind scatter the crumbs wherewith ye do your divinations! May your spices be scattered and may the wind blow away the saffron you hold in your hands for the practising of sorcery!'

(Campbell Thompson 1908: 147; Pesachim 110 i and ii)

The very fact that these notions, whether prophylactic, preventive or practical, are contained within the body of Talmudic thinking and writing, shows the pragmatism of the Sages who were required to deal with particular facts or everyday fears generated by the beliefs held by the society in which they lived.

Lloyd observes that the task of the anthropologist becomes problematic when writing about categories of magic, science, and religion, because 'quite what category in native thought is being translated or interpreted as magic or religion – let alone science – is often quite unclear'.<sup>62</sup> He writes that

in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, Greek historians, philosophers, even medical writers, categorise what their rivals – predecessors or contemporaries – do as *myth*, while what they themselves offer are rational accounts, *logoi*.

(Lloyd 1990: 23)

In all the literature here under assessment, there seems to be no clear-cut distinction between these two categories. Confronted, however, with the Greek requirements of 'proof' (*tekmeria*), 'demonstration' (*apodeixis*), 'testing and scrutiny' (*basanizein, dokimazein*), the casuistry of the rabbinic sages is somewhat cruelly exposed. Lloyd argues that

there is no need to appeal to postulated differences in mentalities as such . . . the important differences concern styles of discourse, converse, reasoning and the varying contexts in which they were used, *where one factor crucial to the evaluation of both the styles and the contexts is the question of the availability and use of explicit concepts of linguistic and other categories*. If in the mentalities debate we simply apply *our* categories to the understanding of so-called primitive thought, we are doubly mistaken.

(Lloyd 1990: 9–10 [emphasis mine])

While the Sages themselves are caught up in the heat of creative inspiration, surrounded by a tradition of intuitive thought-processes in the Babylonian *Weltanschauung*, the counter-intuitive conclusions of logic and proof seem to be left out in the cold, isolated and icy, in the black holes of the *Weltanschauung* of another 'universe'. It is not a particular characteristic of the Greek mentality that brings about this difference in approach, rather a difference in styles of reasoning.

## Part II



## 6

# *EL SHADDAI* – THE MIGHTY HEBREW GOD

## His covenants with the righteous

### **Righteousness as faith in one God**

The five books of the Torah (Pentateuch), written after the destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE, could, with the benefit of hindsight, state:

When you have begotten children and children's children and are long established in the land, should you act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, causing the Lord your God displeasure and vexation, I call heaven and earth this day to witness against you that you shall soon perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess; you shall not long endure in it, but shall be utterly wiped out.

(Deuteronomy 4: 25–31)

The visionary prophet Moses was credited with these words by the post-exilic authors, with exile to Babylon indicated and, seemingly, presaged:

Because they forsook the covenant that the Lord, God of their fathers made with them when He freed them from the land of Egypt; they turned to the service of other gods and worshipped them, . . . So the Lord was incensed at that land . . . and uprooted them from their soil in anger, fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is still the case.

(Deuteronomy 29: 24)

However, in order to give hope of redemption while creating another chapter in a pattern of exile and return, the authors warned:

But if you do not obey me and do not observe all these commandments, if you reject my laws and spurn my rules, so that you do not observe all my commandments and you break my covenant, I in turn will do this to you: I will wreak misery upon you – consumption and fever, which



cause the eyes to pine and the body to languish; you shall sow your seed to no purpose, for your enemies shall eat it.

(Leviticus 26: 14–16)

These words would be vivid and pertinent both to those exiled Judaeans in Babylon and to those who remained impoverished in the desolated ruins of Judaea; the tragedy of the destruction of the Temple was caused by the evil ways of the people.

There was a clear tripartite relationship between the mighty God, His land and His people. God's might becomes evident when His people rout the armies of opposing forces. The one, powerful God conquered the other, lesser gods of the surrounding regions. His domination of both the natural world and the supernatural world was supreme. The *'am qadosh*, the holy people, also identified as *'am Yisrael*, the people of Israel, had a powerful defender in *El Shaddai*, God Almighty. When, in 722 BCE, the Assyrian forces overcame the Israelite northern kingdom, the southern kingdom of Judah (Judaea) was left to face the Babylonian onslaught of 597 BCE alone. God's power was diminished not by an inherent weakness in Himself, but because of the failure of the people to maintain their state of 'righteousness' and their status as an *'am qadosh*. The failure was internalized and the consciousness of the Judaeans was transformed from an awareness of being God's elect nation, to being God's exiled nation. When the return to the kingdom of Judah took place in 539 BCE and the Temple was rebuilt, the Temple cult operated once more. The post-exilic author could write persuasively that:

The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and only a scant few of you shall be left among the nations to which the Lord will drive you. There you will serve man-made gods of wood and stone, that cannot see or hear or eat or smell. But if you search there for the Lord your God, you will find Him, if only you seek Him with all your heart and soul – when you are in distress because all these things have befallen you and, in the end, return to the Lord your God and obey Him. *For the Lord your God is a compassionate God: He will not fail you nor will he let you perish; He will not forget the covenant which He made on oath with your fathers.*

(Deuteronomy 4: 27–31 [emphasis mine])

The cycle was completed; sin, suffering, supplication and salvation marked the years between the building of the Temple by King Solomon in 953 BCE, its destruction in 586 BCE, and the rebuilding when the exile came to an end and return to the land restored the Temple cult.

The close involvement of God in the daily affairs of the ancient Hebrews indicates a relationship of immediacy and intimacy. However, this intimacy was one of indirect control. God gave his instructions to and through elected people

only. Three elements featured in the binding agreements that God made with humanity. God would select a suitable person with whom to make a covenant, he would make a pledge on the understanding that proper behaviour would underwrite the pledge, and he would nominate a sign to symbolize the agreement. Noah, Abraham and Moses in particular, and the congregation of the ancient Hebrew tribes in general, were party to agreements with God. Because the whole congregation ‘witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking’ as the Ten Commandments were being given to Moses at Mount Sinai, they were considered party to the giving of the law, *matan torah*, and in a communal ceremony, averred ‘to do and obey’ (*na‘aseh venishmah*) all the laws that God had given to Moses.<sup>1</sup>

The binding agreement of a covenant implies that both parties will fulfil their part. As God’s power made him the stronger of the two parties, so he could dictate terms of reward and punishment for obedience to or violation of all his laws.

### The nature of God

The ancient Hebrews gave their God many names and many attributes. In the writings of the *Tanakh*, He is *Elohim* (God), he is *YHWH*, or variously, Jehovah, Yahweh, *Adonai* (Lord) and *Adonai Tz’va’ot*, Lord of Hosts. He is *El Shaddai*, the Almighty, and intruigingly, *Eh’ye asher eh’ye* – I shall be that which I shall be, that is, an eternal God of the past, present and future.<sup>2</sup> His attributes range from all-encompassing power, through sacred separation as *qadosh*, to unchanging unity; the ancient Hebrews declared: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One’.<sup>3</sup> He was a God who spoke directly to his elect, Moses, from within a burning bush, and who revealed Himself to Moses, while enumerating His own attributes:

The Lord, the Lord! A God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and truth, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.

(Exodus 34: 6–7)

God’s set of rules, derived from his own attributes, directs the lives of the Hebrew people. The rules reflect the oppositions of pure and polluted (*tahor* and *tameh*), of the sacred and the commonplace (*qadosh* and *chol*) and of righteousness and iniquity (*tzedeq* and *avon*). God expects His people to obey the rules, and if they disobey, they will be punished. Nevertheless, because of God’s power, He can sometimes forgive iniquitous behaviour. As the supreme judge, He demands justice of man, and His own judgements are beyond question. He is seen as an omnipotent, omniscient, even prescient, deity: ‘For I know what plans

they are devising even now before I bring them into the land that I promised on oath'.<sup>4</sup>

The Hebrew creation myth holds that the God, *Elohim*, who created the universe of heaven and earth, is separate and sanctified, different to the other gods of the region. He exists in a pluralized form as *Elohim*, not *El*, and although no indication is given here of what God looked like, he created humankind 'in his image'.<sup>5</sup> God shared his might with humanity in that He gave humans dominion over the other creatures that inhabit air, sea and land; humans are the triumph of creation and God the rigorous task-master who demands obedience to his rules. The tale of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden illustrates the consequence of disobedience. As the price of knowledge of good and evil, the days of all humanity on earth are numbered. Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit on the tree of knowledge, become aware of their nakedness, and begin a life of travail. Cain, son of Adam and Eve, kills his brother Abel in an act of bloodshed – *damim*. Abel's blood 'cries out . . . from the ground' against the unjust taking of his life.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, obedience to God's laws is signified by the word '*tzedeq*' – variously translated as the qualities of righteousness, justice, equity and virtue.

The central, pivotal importance of this concept is powerfully emphasized: '*Tzedeq, tzedeq tir'dof*' – 'Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you'.<sup>7</sup> The pursuit of justice is diametrically opposed to forms of ritual performance bereft of moral significance:

'What need have I of all your sacrifices?' says the Lord. 'I am sated with burnt offerings of rams, and suet of fatlings, and blood of bulls; and I have no delight in lambs and he-goats. . . . who asked that of you? Trample my courts no more; bringing oblations is futile, incense is offensive to Me. . . . Assemblies with iniquity I cannot abide.'

(Isaiah 1: 11)

The contemptuous words of the prophet describe those who are eager to sacrifice, and depict the Temple courtyards overrun and trampled by the unjust – those whose 'hands are stained with crime' and who are urged to 'cease to do evil; learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice; aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow'.<sup>8</sup> These verses from Isaiah are a variation on Exodus 22: 21:

You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

God's attributes of compassion and kindness are emphasized, while his displeasure at being disobeyed is again illustrated.

**God’s covenant – the *brit* – with the righteous**

Noah, as a man of unblemished righteousness – *’ish tzadiq tamim* – was chosen to escape God’s punishment during the Flood, and he, his family, and the beasts on the Ark, were saved. God made a covenant with Noah in which He promised never again to destroy the earth in this way. Noah, however, was not a ‘Hebrew’. The texts of Genesis show that all men are created in God’s image, but those who are not Hebrews are seen as separate from the people who are the descendants of Abram. God chose Noah as the representative of humanity, and issued a set of commandments designated as having been given to the ‘Descendants of Noah’ – laws by which humanity in general is obliged, by Rabbinic interpretation, to live:

You must not . . . eat flesh with its life-blood (*basar be-nafsho dammo*) in it. But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning . . . Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in His image did God make man. Be fertile, then, and increase; abound on the earth and increase on it.

(Genesis 9: 4–7)

The token or sign of this covenant is a feature of the natural world – the rainbow – that could be witnessed by all humanity.

Abram, because of his unquestioning monotheistic faith was an *’ish tzadiq*, a righteous man, so God made a covenant with him: ‘And he believed in the Lord; and He took account of this as [a mark of] his righteousness’.<sup>9</sup> Abram was granted possession of the land of Canaan and was guaranteed heirs. God said to him, ‘Look toward heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to count them . . . So shall your offspring be’.<sup>10</sup> God addressed Abram, saying:

I am *El Shaddai* – God Almighty. Walk in my ways and be blameless – *tamim*. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous . . . And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations . . . I will maintain my covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages . . . I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God.

(Genesis 27: 1ff.)

Abram’s wife, Sarai, was unable to bear children, so her maid, Hagar, bore Ishmael to Abram. Abram and Sarai, by divine decree, changed their names – they became Abraham and Sarah. They then had a son of their own – Isaac. Abraham’s sons received the benefits of God’s care and consideration: ‘As for

Ishmael . . . I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous . . . and I will make of him a great nation. But my covenant I will maintain with Isaac'.<sup>11</sup> Abraham, his son Isaac and Isaac's son, Jacob, were the 'patriarchs' of the ancient Hebrews. One night, after wrestling for many hours with a mysterious being, Jacob was renamed *Yisra'el*. At dawn, this being or 'man' said: 'Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven (*sarita*) with beings divine and human, and have prevailed'. So the Hebrew people become known as the Children of Israel.<sup>12</sup>

The notion of a covenant, *brit*, that bound the Hebrews to their God, was the sign of the 'elect'. God's covenant with Noah guaranteed the promise to humanity that the earth would never again be flooded, and this promise was eternalized through the sign of the rainbow. God's covenant with Abraham, however, guaranteed the Hebrew people their right to possess and live in the land of Canaan, while God pledged himself to be their God. God made another covenant with Abraham, this time with its sign cut in the flesh of the male. The threat of social death by excommunication – 'cutting off' – was associated with failure to observe the covenant of *brit mila* – circumcision. The permitted bloodshed involved in circumcision symbolized a bond between the people and their God:

God further said to Abraham, 'Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: . . . And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days. . . . Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact. And if any male who is uncircumcised fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his kin; he has broken my covenant.'

(Genesis 27: 9–14)

When Moses, a humble shepherd, was chosen by God to lead the captive Israelites from slavery in Egypt, he was the vehicle through which the Torah, the body of Hebrew law and learning, was to be given. God spoke to Him:

I am the Lord; I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as *El Shaddai*, but I did not make myself known to them by My name YHWH. I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners.

(Exodus 6: 2–3)

Moses is said to have received the Ten Spoken Words, the Decalogue directly from God on Mount Sinai.<sup>13</sup> These commandments are central to the Torah, and are the main principles of the faith, embodying the essence of ancient Hebrew law, dealing with the relationship between man and his God, and governing behaviour between man and his neighbour. The first four commandments relate

specifically to God and how he wished to be worshipped, while the remaining six dictate proper behaviour within society. God's unity is proclaimed, followed by the prohibition against worshipping other gods. It is forbidden to make or worship an idol, and blasphemy is likewise prohibited. God himself could castigate or be compassionate, while some infringements could be dealt with by the priests or assembly of the congregation. The injunction to rest on the seventh day is followed by the requirement to respect one's parents. The honouring of parents would ensure 'long endurance' in the land of Canaan.<sup>14</sup> God enjoined Moses to tell the people the importance of observing a day of rest every seven days:

You must keep My sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I the Lord have consecrated you. You shall keep the sabbath, for it is holy for you. He who profanes it shall be put to death: whoever does work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his kin. . . . The Israelite people shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout the ages as a *covenant* for all time.

(Exodus 31: 13–16)

The crimes of murder, lewd or unchaste behaviour (usually translated as 'adultery'), theft, bearing false witness and covetousness complete the set of prohibitions. There were two kinds of punishment for infringement of laws: firstly, the Lord could 'blot out a name' or inflict instant death himself, and secondly, people themselves could ensure that a miscreant would be 'cut off from his kin' or put to death in a variety of ways. God's laws dealt with matters requiring the death sentence in cases of bloodshed or incest, and with recompense in cases of violation of property. Even if a law related to a contentious issue between two people, clearly God was the one who had laid down the relevant law, and even if material retribution had to be paid or the transgressor was to be expelled from the community by the community itself, the significant factor remained that God's law had been transgressed and that he would brook no deviations from the terms of his covenants. Those terms were uncompromising: 'You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I the Lord am your God. You shall faithfully observe My laws: I the Lord make you holy'.<sup>15</sup> Idol-worship was intolerable and sorcery and divination were strictly forbidden. Holy things and holy food were not to be touched by the ritually impure and many edicts regarding proper social mores culminate in the phrase 'I am the Lord'.<sup>16</sup> The consequences of iniquity, *avon*, appear in several different places in the Pentateuch and some are duplicated in Deuteronomy, when the 'summing up' process before the death of Moses takes place.

### The covenant in blood

The terms of the *brit* make it quite clear that Israel was made *qadosh* by divine dispensation and that the Sabbath day, in being *qadosh*, was bound to be observed. So, two particular rites, the circumcision of males and the observance of the Sabbath, are the tokens of ancient Judaism because they are specifically mentioned as part of the *brit*, the covenant between God and his people. The covenant related directly to God's own sanctity and his proprietorship over a land that was to be sanctified by people who embodied the state of being *qadosh* and whose behaviour was described as *tzadiq* – righteous.<sup>17</sup>

God's expectations of the Children of Israel were symbolized in the 'covenant of blood', *dam ha-brit*, that took place after the revelation at Mount Sinai. Moses sprinkled the blood of sacrificed oxen over the assembled people after they had agreed to obey God's commandments.<sup>18</sup> Robertson Smith noted that in 'the earlier parts of the Old Testament a theophany is always taken to be a good reason for sacrificing on the spot'.<sup>19</sup> There appears, in the early texts, to be a direct connection between experiencing a vision of God, entering into his contract of covenant, and a subsequent ritual of sacrificial bloodletting.

The strength of the symbolism of blood for the ancient Hebrews can be traced from the prohibition against wilful bloodshed as murder, through the individual circumcision blood-tie and the communal blood-tie to the powerful link between human life-blood and the blood of sacrificed animals that procured atonement for states of ritual impurity. In addition, the daily sacrifices and sacrifices in honour of various festivals ensured that many slaughtered domestic animals were laid upon the altar as burnt offerings, while their blood was dashed upon the base of the altar. God needed to enjoy the 'pleasing odour' (*re'ach nicho'ach*) of the smoke of sacrifice every day, and his priests were commanded to share his holy food.<sup>20</sup> Domestic animals could be slaughtered, but human life was sacred. In the traditions of ancient Judaism, the animal blood shed during sacrificial offerings effected changes in the ritual status of people who moved, symbolically, between states of ritual impurity and purity. The priests who mediated between the deity and those who brought offerings were themselves required not only to be ritually pure, but also unblemished in body. Biological occurrences such as childbirth, menstruation and seminal discharge required launderings, bathings and offerings; these were covered by the purging efficacy of *chata'at* (sin) offerings and the mitigating effects of *asham* (guilt) offerings, and were necessary for the maintenance of a body of people who were *qadosh*. The human body in society was perceived as relating to other bodies, both human and animal, in terms of criminal damage or material exploitation, and was seen as a body that could be rewarded or punished corporally.

Although sacrificial offerings that related largely to biological functions of ritual purity and impurity were not appropriate for the regulation of social aspects of human life or interactions between people, the ritual pollution of a single body as a result of a biological accident represented a microcosm of the

social schema. Pollution followed the intentional spilling of human blood, from incestuous or other forbidden sexual acts, and from idol worship or dealings with supernatural forces. This gross pollution had an effect on the macrocosm, and wreaked its havoc on the land itself. If the land became ritually polluted by unacceptable behaviour, the people of the covenant would no longer be permitted to live in the land. Just as animal blood was used in sacrificial offerings, human blood became the essence of expiation when it was deliberately spilt in a punitive measure where God's laws had been disobeyed. Righteousness was typified by obedience to every aspect of the Decalogue. The pursuit of 'justice' was also the pursuit of 'righteousness' and this attribute was perceived to be as much a part of the obligation to obey those of God's laws relating to Him as well as those relating to His creations, men and women.

### Idiosyncrasies of the texts

It is possible to associate the great number of listed infringements of the laws of the Torah with their simpler counterparts in the Decalogue. The Torah rules dealing with social relations were not necessarily associated with offerings at a sanctuary and the commandments of the Decalogue are accorded rewards or punishments. There seems to be no fixed pattern to the layout of instructions both positive and negative, and many repetitions are to be found throughout the texts. There are, however, two broad categories: ritual errors and other misdemeanours. Whereas states of ritual impurity were mediated through particular ceremonies, people guilty of iniquities were subject to acts of retribution. In the Decalogue, the 'you shall' and 'you shall not' are stated baldly and are interspersed with verses that exemplify the power of the Lord:

For I the Lord thy God am a jealous ('impassioned', 'vengeful' or 'zealous') God, visiting the iniquity (*avon*) of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments."

(Exodus 20: 5)

The array of crimes and punishments outlined in the texts almost defies categorization. The juxtaposition of the following sequence of verses from Exodus 22 is typical and indicative of the problem of classification of categories:

- vs. 15 If a man seduces a virgin for whom the bride-price has not been paid, and lies with her, he must make her his wife by payment of a bride-price.
- vs. 16 If her father refuses to give her to him, he must still weigh out silver in accordance with the bride-price for virgins.
- vs. 17 You shall not allow a sorceress to live.



- vs. 18 Whoever lies with a beast shall be put to death.  
 vs. 19 Whoever sacrifices to a god other than the Lord alone shall be proscribed.  
 vs. 20 You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

A mixture of seduction, deception, restititional measures, paternalism, financial recompense, dabbling in the supernatural, punishment by death, bestiality, idolatry, excommunication and notions of social justice are juxtaposed in these verses. A seemingly impossible combination of crimes, punishments and ideas appears, and this is typical of confusing catalogues that recur in the Pentateuch. However, the verses also reflect three concepts: vss. 15/16 deal with laws of restitution; vs. 17 deals with God’s sovereignty over nature and supernature and His essence as *qadosh* – separate and holy – and vs. 19 echoes this. Vs. 18 is a reminder of *kil’ayim* and *sha’atnez*, forbidden mixtures, which are different in nature to laws of restitution. Vs. 20 deals with ‘the other’, yet even if exogamy, as a ‘forbidden mixture’, was not permitted, the ‘stranger’ was not to be exploited. I shall offer an analysis of the verses in the sequence, including pertinent laws enumerated elsewhere in scripture.

## Discussion

### *Verses 15 and 16*

In circumstances where violation of a person or property occurred, the guilty party was ordered to make financial recompense or material restitution, (the famous ‘*lex talionis*’), or sentenced to flogging, and the cutting off of a hand.<sup>21</sup> The injunctions of the Decalogue against theft and robbery, bearing false witness and covetous behaviour were classified and dealt with by priests or magistrates.<sup>22</sup> Abduction, in order to sell or enslave a fellow Israelite, and the taking of human life, were forbidden.<sup>23</sup> The implication in ancient Hebrew law when violation of the human body occurred was that the altar of God had been desecrated: ‘When a man schemes against another and kills him treacherously, you shall take him from My very altar to be put to death’.<sup>24</sup> The altar was rendered ‘holy and a habitation of divine life’ through being ‘consecrated with blood, and periodically reconsecrated’ when the holy blood of sacrificed beasts was dashed at its base during every sacrificial rite.<sup>25</sup>

### *Verses 17 and 19: God as qadosh*

Ideas associated with the concept of the sacred, *qadosh*, pertained to the Godhead itself. In the Decalogue, desecration of God’s name and desecration of the Sabbath day were connected to the sanctity of God, where idol-worship, particularly, was a threat to the very fundament of ancient Judaism.

If God Himself was the target of abuse in an act of blasphemy, the sentence was stoning to death. A case is described of a man, half-Israelite, half-Egyptian, who cursed and blasphemed, using the name of God, the four Hebrew letters YHWH, which are usually transcribed as Yahweh. The man was taken outside the camp, where all who had been within earshot of the blasphemy placed their hands upon his head and he was then stoned by the whole community.<sup>26</sup> This is reminiscent of the treatment of the bullock of atonement in the case of a communal sin:<sup>27</sup> ‘And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the Lord; and the bullock shall be killed before the Lord’.<sup>28</sup>

A joint, or communal responsibility is signified when all hands were placed on the head of the victim, and the communal stoning would have taken place outside the camp, or outside the walls of the city. The pollution caused by this bloodshed was thus physically excluded from civil society.

If a person, either a citizen or a stranger, acted defiantly and reviled the Lord, then ‘that person shall be cut off from among his people’.<sup>29</sup> So, in the case of blasphemy, there were two punishments – stoning and ‘cutting off’ – that is, physical and social death. The idea of separating holy things, holy places and holy times from profane things, places and times, could be extended to the notion of cutting off or excommunication of wrong-doers as separation from the main body of the people.

An invasion of God’s territory, the realm of the *qadosh*, extended to the world of spirits and ghosts; bloodguilt, *damim*, was the condition described in the case of ‘a man or a woman who has a ghost or a familiar spirit’; the sentence for the crime of bloodguilt was death by being pelted with stones. Worship of other gods was associated with dabbling in the supernatural. Worship of the Canaanite God Molech involved the sacrifice of children – ‘let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire’ – and this injunction is followed immediately by a list of those people who would by their actions question the omnipotence and omniscience of the Lord God of ancient Judaism, namely the augur, the soothsayer, the diviner, the sorcerer, ‘one who casts spells or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits or one who inquires of the dead’.<sup>30</sup> The rules were clear: ‘You shall not practise divination’; ‘Do not turn to ghosts and do not inquire of familiar spirits, to be defiled by them’ and, finally, ‘You shall not let a sorceress live’. The warning from God was unremitting: ‘and if any person turns to ghosts and familiar spirits and goes astray after them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from among his people’.<sup>31</sup>

The conquest of the land of Canaan and the butchering of its inhabitants was seen as justifiable because reprehensible customs were commonplace amongst the indigenous tribes, and the land had to be purified and sanctified in order to be suitable for the worship of the God who was *qadosh*. The danger of not eradicating those who practised idolatrous cults was emphasised with a double threat:

But if you do not dispossess the inhabitants of the land, those whom you allow to remain shall be stings in your eyes and thorns in your

sides, and they shall harass you in the land in which you live; so that I will do to you what I planned to do to them.

(Numbers 33: 55–6)

### *Verses 18 and 20*

I have extrapolated from the original features of *kil'ayim* and *sha'atnez* the nature of a 'forbidden mixture' and applied this to socially forbidden mixtures that rely on the same underlying principle. The law of *kil'ayim sha'atnez* states that:

You shall observe my laws. You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind (*kil'ayim*); you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed (*kil'ayim*); you shall not put on cloth from a mixture of two kinds of material (*kil'ayim sha'atnez*).

(Leviticus 19: 19; Deuteronomy 22: 9–11)

Those ideas associated with forbidden mixtures are represented by God's living creations, both man and beast, and include various forms of incestuous marriage, men 'lying' with men as if with women, men 'lying' with beasts and women 'lying' with beasts.

Incest incurred childlessness: if a man married his sister, so that he saw 'her nakedness' and she saw 'his nakedness', it was a disgrace; they were cut off 'in the sight of their kinsfolk'.<sup>32</sup> If a man was found having sexual intercourse with another man's wife, both would be stoned to death and equally: 'If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing; they shall be put to death – their bloodguilt is upon them'.<sup>33</sup> Death by fire was prescribed in two instances: if a man married a woman and her mother, 'it is depravity; both he and they shall be put to the fire' and if the daughter of a priest defiled herself 'through her harlotry, it is her father whom she defiles; she shall be put to the fire'.<sup>34</sup> The holiness of the priesthood was upheld by the honour of its women and here the concept of 'bloodguilt' exceeds that of mere shame. Bestiality, too, is anathema:

If a man has carnal relations with a beast, he shall be put to death; and you shall kill the beast. If a woman approaches any beast to mate with it, you shall kill the woman and the beast; they shall be put to death – their bloodguilt is upon them.

(Leviticus 20: 15,16)

An interesting interpretation of the law was described in the case of a virgin who was engaged to another and was raped by a man, in a town, and she did not cry out; the two would be taken out to the gate of that town and stoned to death. But if the man seized a betrothed virgin outside the town, only he would be put to

death – no-one could hear her cries, because he had attacked her in the open.<sup>35</sup> If a man accused his wife of not being a virgin and evidence of her virginity could not be shown, she was stoned to death.<sup>36</sup>

Although seemingly associated only with ‘forbidden mixtures’, the rule of endogamy was linked to the prohibition against idol-worship and consequent exile and therefore also linked with notions of the sacred – *qadosh*. A description in Deuteronomy reports how seven nations, although numerically superior to the Israelites, would nevertheless be conquered; but the people were given a clear warning: ‘You shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods’.<sup>37</sup> During the conquest of the land of Canaan, wholesale slaughter by the incoming tribes of Israel of these idol-worshipping peoples was ‘permitted’. The children of Israel were to obey God’s laws, and if they did not, they would be expelled from the land, like its previous inhabitants – the many indigenous tribes of Canaan. An incident is described where ‘the people profaned themselves by whoring with Moabite women and worshipped their god. The Lord said to Moses, “Take all the ringleaders and have them publicly impaled.”’<sup>38</sup>

Josephus referred to this incident, describing the Moabite plan to destroy the Hebrew nation by means of feminine wiles rather than war, seeing that ‘no entire destruction can seize upon the nation of the Hebrews, neither by war, nor by plague, or by scarcity of the fruits of the earth . . . for the providence of God is concerned to preserve them from such a misfortune’. Moabite women were duly dispatched to seduce the young men, who ‘were allured by their beauty’ and wished to marry them. The Moabite women, ‘as soon as they perceived that they had made them their slaves’ . . . argued that:

since you make use of such customs and conduct of life as are entirely different from all other men, insomuch that your kinds of food are peculiar to yourselves, and your kinds of drink not common to others, it will be absolutely necessary, if you would have us for your wives, that you do withal worship our gods.

(Josephus *Antiquities* IV: vi: 6–13)

Idol-worship would lead not only to death, but to exile: ‘You must not bring an abhorrent thing [such as an idol] into your house, or *you will be proscribed like it*; you must reject it as abominable and abhorrent, for it is proscribed, *herem*’.<sup>39</sup> One of God’s many warnings against idolatrous cults depicted the horror with which he viewed any behaviour that did not conform to his rules:

Do not defile yourselves in any of those ways, for it is by such that the nations that I am casting out before you defiled themselves. Thus the land became defiled; and I called it to account for its iniquity, and the land spewed out its inhabitants. But you must keep My laws and My

rules, and you must not do any of those abhorrent things . . . so let not the land spew you out for defiling it.

(Leviticus 18: 24ff.)

The children of Israel, having vanquished the tribes of Canaan mercilessly as instructed by God, could say that the land ‘spewed out’ its previous inhabitants. Even so, the influence of the foreign gods was always there, tempting the ancient Hebrew people away from monotheism, while contact with foreign ways would entice them to indulge in forbidden practices.

### The ‘foreign ways’

The prohibition against worshipping sticks and stones was quite clear: ‘You shall not set up a sacred post (*asheira*) – any kind of pole (*eitz*) beside the altar of the Lord your God that you may make – or erect a stone pillar (*matzeiva*); for such the Lord your God detests’.<sup>40</sup> The *asheira* is described as ‘A sacred tree or pole, set up near an altar, as a symbol of the goddess Asherah, probably a Canaanite goddess of good fortune and happiness’. The poles were said to be ‘near an altar for idol worship, generally for the worship of Astarte’ who was ‘the Venus of the Phoenicians’ or ‘the goddess of fertility’.<sup>41</sup> The various places of idol worship were described:

You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshipped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree. Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put the sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterate their name from that site. Do not worship the Lord your God in like manner, but look only to the site that the Lord your God will choose amidst all your tribes as His habitation, to establish His name there.

(Deuteronomy 12: 2)

During the time of the prophet Jeremiah there appears to have been widespread worship of the Queen of Heaven, Astarte, an import from the north. God Himself berates the prophet:

Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke Me.

(Jeremiah 7: 17–18)

The worship of Molech or indeed any other foreign god was associated with profanation of the name of the God of the ancient Hebrews.<sup>42</sup> To illustrate this

principle, a description is given of a community that appeared to be indulging in idol-worship, together with the consequent necessity for due process in ascertaining facts before taking punitive action. Investigation, inquiry and interrogation were mandatory before a decision could be taken to kill the inhabitants of a town, where their herds would be slaughtered and the town razed to the ground:

If scoundrels in a town subverted others to worship other gods – investigate and inquire and interrogate thoroughly – if it is true, put the inhabitants of that town to the sword and put its cattle to the sword – and burn the town and all its spoil – and it shall remain an everlasting ruin, never to be rebuilt.

(Deuteronomy 13: 2ff.)

The obsession with the dangers of mixing indicates that the fascination of foreign idols was never far from the minds of the ordinary people, nor was this attraction ever completely blotted out. The constant prohibitions on the practice of sooth-saying or divination is evidence enough of the persistence of the ‘foreign ways’, notwithstanding the dire consequences. It remains somewhat paradoxical that the clear-cut relationship between God and the people with whom He had made covenants was blurred throughout the Torah by references to the supernatural in the form of dream interpretation and magical episodes.

Writing about the concept of a *brit* or covenant was perhaps deemed necessary after the destruction of the Temple in order to show how the people had thought and acted while the nation was emerging from slavery in Egypt. The end of the ‘age of prophecy’ then signified the cessation of God’s direct communication through specifically elected human beings. The visions of prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel may be seen as evidence of a transformation where God, primarily perceived as a rigorous and austere creator-God and the Lord of a band of unsettled tribal people of the wilderness, was then portrayed by the post-exilic author-editor as a God who dwelt in a splendid Temple in Jerusalem, and who had grown increasingly impatient with those who, although ostensibly part of a covenantal congregation, continually disobeyed his laws.

## THE ‘SACRED’ AND THE ‘PROFANE’

The story of the birth of the Israelite people, incorporating their creation myth, is told in the Pentateuch, *Chamisha Chum'shei Torah* – the five books of the Law, or of Moses.<sup>1</sup> The texts tell of a period of slavery in Egypt, the story of the exodus from Egypt, and entry into the land of Canaan. The five books describe a people bound to an invisible and omnipotent god who is particularly associated with the land of Canaan: ‘And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and settlers with me’.<sup>2</sup> He will allow the people to live in this land only as a holy people, obeying His laws and performing purification rites to sustain a state of holiness. The god himself is the source of this holiness and, being holy, expects the people to be holy too.<sup>3</sup> Holiness is attained through the maintenance of a system of categorization and separation. Certain things are holy (or proscribed), others are polluting, and certain acts are required to cleanse a polluted person. The body itself is the central point of reference, with rules clustering around the foods eaten, the clothes worn, and ritual actions that the body must perform.

A system of reward and punishment governs bodily practices and moral choices. Some acts are punishable by death, some result in ‘cutting off’ from the rest of society, while others require expiatory performances. An intricate pattern of feast days and sacrifices is interwoven within the daily lives of the people, who have to keep a balance of personal holiness by adhering to personal purification rituals combined with animal sacrifices. Atonement for sins also involves animal sacrifice. These sacrifices are carried out in a sanctuary, by a priestly tribe who are anointed and sanctified. Provision is made for individual and communal atonement, purification and punishment.

This central dialectic of holiness, sacredness and separation recalls the terms in which Durkheim wrote about religion. Mestrovic (1994) has written that ‘from dropping the David in David Émile Durkheim’s name to the relentless efforts to make him seem Franco-Christian and Parsonian, Durkheim’s Jewish heritage and the influence of that heritage upon his sociology is being denied’. Pickering reminds us that

very little was or could be published about his life. The reason was simply the fact that only limited material has been bequeathed to

posterity. As is common knowledge, letters, manuscripts and other materials disappeared during World War II. In 1943 the Nazis occupied his daughter's house in which all his manuscripts were kept and threw them . . . onto the street.

(Pickering 2002: 9)

Durkheim's ideas about religion were rooted in his intimate understanding of Judaism; I shall argue, more specifically, that his theory provides a particularly good analytical account of Judaism, if of no other religion. I shall also show that many later Durkheimians – including such contemporary anthropologists as Douglas (1966) and Lewis (1987) – have unduly simplified his central antithesis, while Durkheim himself offered an accurate and subtle account of the ambiguous Biblical concept of the sacred.

David Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) was born in the Vosges, France, the son, grandson and great-grandson of Rabbis.

He grew up within the confines of a close-knit, orthodox and traditional Jewish family . . . and was destined for the rabbinate and his early education was directed to that end: he studied for a time at a rabbinical school. Yet he soon decided, while still a schoolboy, not to follow the family tradition.

(Lukes 1973: 39)

The family lived a life of austerity and 'from the time of his childhood, he retained an exacting sense of duty and a serious, indeed austere, view of life; he could never experience pleasure without a sense of remorse'.<sup>4</sup> He was always conscious of his Jewish origin and came to political maturity in the wake of France's defeat by Prussia that unleashed an anti-semitic campaign, most notable for the prosecution of Dreyfus.

[Anti-Semitism] had already been seen in the regions of the East at the time of the war of 1870; being myself of Jewish origin, I was then able to observe it at close hand. The Jews were blamed for defeats.

(Lukes 1973: 41)

Jones writes that the rabbinic tradition in Alsace ensured that 'religion was synonymous with a community of shared moral beliefs and legal practices'.<sup>5</sup>

Although Durkheim followed the ideological path of the positivist generation of great Republican academics, his approach to the analysis of religion seems, upon closer scrutiny, to have been strongly influenced by his Jewish background. But there was another, more immediate stimulus: his reading of Robertson Smith's great work on the ancient Semitic religions. The impact of his reading of Robertson Smith was emphasized by Durkheim:



it was not until 1895 that I achieved a clear view of the essential role played by religion in social life . . . all my previous researches had to be taken up afresh in order to be made to harmonize with these new insights . . . [This re-orientation] was entirely due to the studies of religious history which I had just undertaken, and notably to the reading of Robertson Smith and his school.

(Lukes 1973: 237)

The religious system of archaic societies became a privileged topic of research for him. He saw religious experience – mainly rooted in the performance of ritual – as an experience of reality and not one of self- or communal-delusion. This reality at the heart of ritual is revealed to be society itself. Rites effect a communion between the members of a group.

The power of Robertson Smith's account of Semitic religions was surely in part that it translated into objective language the central theological ideas with which Durkheim was so familiar. However, Durkheim was reluctant to make comparisons between civilized peoples and religions, and primitive tribes and cults. Eilberg-Schwartz writes:

The religion and culture of higher civilizations could shed no light on the early history of religion, culture, and humanity. An opposition between Israelite religion and primitive religions was contained in this larger distinction between primitive and civilized peoples. This is why the religion of Israel fell outside the purview of anthropological inquiry. Although it retained survivals from a primitive past, Israelite religion had largely transcended and thus obscured its primitive origins.<sup>6</sup>

(Eilberg-Schwartz 1990: 19)

My argument, nevertheless, will be that consciously or not, influenced by his own background, an influence reinforced by his reading of Robertson Smith's work on Semitic religions, Durkheim developed his theory of religion in the idiom of Judaism, and that therefore it is perhaps peculiarly fitted to the analysis of Judaism.

At the heart of Durkheim's analysis is a dichotomy between the 'sacred' and the 'profane'. There was

a bipartite division of the whole universe, known and knowable into two classes which embrace all that exists, but which radically exclude each other . . . Religious beliefs are the *représentations* which express the nature of sacred things and the relationships which they sustain, either with each other or with profane things.

(Lukes 1973: 24–5)

Cooper writes:

I consider sacred/profane to be an opposition, and view the profane to be diametrically opposed to the sacred. I therefore assume the existence of a cultural-religious category of everyday things, which are neither sacred nor profane. This may be a *departure* from the original formulation of sacred/profane found in Durkheim (1965, 52), but I find this departure necessary for dealing with the present material.

(Cooper 1987: 72 n. 6)

Although the analysis given here will challenge the sacred/profane opposition, it is in this 'departure' that the basis of my argument for this chapter lies.

Whereas other, pantheistic, religions in the Land of Canaan envisage gods representing entities in nature, or male and female deities uniting in a procreative process guaranteeing, for example, good harvests<sup>7</sup>, the Israelite God is 'set apart' from all other gods – *qadosh*.<sup>8</sup> Douglas states that 'the God of Israel is the God of life, all the other gods are dead';<sup>9</sup> dead they may be in Douglas' view, but nevertheless they are worshipped continually by the inhabitants of Canaan, and remain tempting to the Israelites always. Eilberg-Schwartz's assertion that 'the Israelite God did not have other gods with whom to interact,' reflects the accepted monotheistic view of traditional Judaism.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, there are many gods, but one is the true, holy God, set apart. Separation of the part from the whole is intrinsic to the nature of *qadosh*. Durkheim recognized this characteristic of the sacred – that it is something set apart from all else.

In the same way as the God of the Hebrews has separated himself from 'other gods', so, by its daily behaviour, must the holy people separate itself from the other nations surrounding it. Durkheim, using a Greek phrase, *homoiosis to theo*, describes the state of *being made the same as the god*. By doing what the god/totem does – in this instance, being *qadosh* – you become like the god.<sup>11</sup> If the Israelites perform all the correct rituals and obey all the commandments, they become 'set apart' from the other peoples in the region, that is, *qadosh*.

Priests (*Kohanim*) from the priestly tribe (Levites) were the facilitators of purification rites and their role in the Tent of Meeting (*ohel mo'ed*) enabled people to become 'pure' and therefore '*qadosh*'. The priests were forbidden, on pain of death, to drink wine or strong drink before entering the Tent of Meeting so 'that you may put difference between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean' – *ben ha-qadosh u'ven ha-chol, u'ven ha-tameh u'ven ha-tahor*.<sup>12</sup> The clear inference is that the mind could be clouded by the effects of alcohol and confusion would be the outcome. The injunction provides the key to the crucial requirement of vigilance regarding purity and pollution that is central to ancient Judaism.

Above all, holiness is equated with *separateness* from profane, everyday life. Durkheim defines the sacred thus:

Sacred beings are separated beings. That which characterizes them is that there is a break of continuity between them and the profane beings . . . A whole group of rites has the object of realizing this state of separation which is essential. Since their function is to prevent *undue mixings* and to keep one of these two domains from encroaching upon the other, they are only able to impose abstentions or negative acts.

(Durkheim 1971: 299)

The creation of the natural environment described in Genesis involves the separation of several elements; light from darkness, sky from sea, sea from land, evening from morning, sun from moon and stars.<sup>13</sup> These separations are described using the verb *le-hav'dil* – to divide.<sup>14</sup> When six days have elapsed, the seventh day is *qadosh* because it is so different from the previous six, and the following six; the acts of creativity have ceased. When the mundanity of the weekday as opposed to the Sabbath or an 'appointed time' is described, the word *chol* is used. This is 'common' time, as opposed to time that has been 'set apart'. The word *chol* also has the implication of profanation – *chillul ha-shem* is profanation of God's holy name. The term *chol* can thus be read as an opposition to *qadosh*; it encapsulates the concepts of both the mundanity of the secular or the blasphemy of the profane. Somewhere in-between are the intermediate days of an 'appointed time', *chol ha-mo'ed* – where the first and seventh days of a feast, such as Passover, are *qadosh*, but the intervening days are not, yet they are still set apart by being incorporated within the appointed time of the festival.

Although *qadosh* is often translated as 'holy', there is the further and specific implication that the holy object is 'cut off' or 'set apart' from other objects. This state of separation may indicate not only states of sanctity, but also prohibition and profanity. One of the punishments for disobedience to God is *karet* – cutting off. The threat of 'cutting off' is the mirror image of the state of holiness – the cut-off-person is not holy, has rendered him- or herself profane by his or her own actions, and activates an opposite state to that of *qadosh*. Being *karet* implies not merely excommunication, although there is a sense of that in the threat; *karet* means being cut off from the community and the people as a whole, and implies childlessness and/or early death. Exclusion from communal life and failure to reproduce are circumstances clearly associated with social life and social 'death', as described by Robertson Smith.<sup>15</sup>

'One of the greatest services which Robertson Smith has rendered to the science of religions', Durkheim remarked, 'is to have pointed out the ambiguity of the notion of sacredness'.<sup>16</sup> This particular idea of *qadosh* does not operate on the basis of a simple dichotomy between sacred and profane. The very same term, *qadosh*, can mean 'to sanctify, consecrate, dedicate, purify, or keep pure', or is used to indicate something that becomes prohibited. For example, a person who is cut off and separated from normal society is the *Qadesh* (m) or *Q'desha* (f), the sodomite, or temple prostitute<sup>17</sup>; that which has been separated is not holy, but profane.<sup>18</sup> Also, the act of sowing seeds of plants other than the vine

within the confines of a vineyard, or planting vines among seeds of a different species, renders those seeds and vines condemned – *qadosh*.<sup>19</sup>

There are many other prohibitions relating to Durkheim's formulation of 'undue mixing', though these do not result in a person or thing becoming *qadosh*. A prohibition against ploughing with an ox and an ass harnessed together follows the injunction on the sowing of mixed seed.<sup>20</sup> Cross-breeding between species is forbidden.<sup>21</sup> There is a prohibition against wearing clothing of mixed fabric – cotton may not be woven with linen, or wool with flax, for example.<sup>22</sup> The significance of clothing is further evident in the prohibition against cross-dressing by both sexes,<sup>23</sup> while the laundering of clothing is often associated with purificative rites of bodily immersion in water.

Related to this idea that a god, a person, a time or a thing that is separated can be both sacred and profane, is the *cherem*.<sup>24</sup> The word can mean 'excommunicated', or 'banned'; but it also carries the implication of something that has been 'dedicated', that is, set aside for priestly or sacred use. There is also an intimation of an extreme opposite – 'doomed to destruction'. Both people and things can be under a *cherem*, in which case they are proscribed. But a person, beast or field may be devoted to God, and called *cherem*, in which case it becomes *qodesh qodashim* – 'holy of holies' – and can never be redeemed or sold.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Tahor and tameh***<sup>26</sup>

It is not enough to recognize the ambiguity of the notion of *qadosh*. It must also be distinguished from the notions of purity and pollution.

*Tahor* means 'clean, pure, not subject or susceptible to levitical uncleanness'; a fish, a bird, a domestic animal that is *tahor* may be eaten. There is also a sense of 'to be bright, to glitter'. It can also be used in the sense of 'to purify, to make (levitically) clean, to absolve from sin, to be cleansed, to cleanse oneself'. *Tameh* means 'to be filled up, inaccessible, forbidden, levitically impure'. It can also mean 'to be unclean, to make unclean, soil, defile, or to be made unclean'; the latter as in 'to make oneself unclean by handling a corpse'. Within the category of *tameh* fall the menstruant, the giver and receiver of seminal fluid in sexual intercourse and the person who has had contact with a corpse. Both people and objects can be contaminated or polluted by contact with the *tameh*.<sup>27</sup> *Niddah* indicates isolation or a condition of uncleanness.<sup>28</sup> In the period shortly after childbirth and during menstruation a woman is *niddah*. She is both isolated and unclean, unapproachable by her husband until she has been cleansed, or purified. A person in a state of ritual physical uncleanness may be purified in a ceremony, but if the unclean person *refrains* from taking part in such a ceremony, he or she risks being 'cut off'. Worship of gods other than the Hebrew deity brings the risk of being 'cut off', as does the eating of blood.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike most of his commentators, Durkheim was well aware that the 'sacred' may be holy or impure:

There are two sorts of sacredness, the propitious and the impropitious, and not only is there no break of continuity between these two opposed forms, but also one object may pass from the one to the other without changing its nature. The pure is made out of the impure, and reciprocally. It is in the possibility of these transmutations that the ambiguity of the sacred consists.

(Durkheim 1971: 411)

In the same way that a particular person can move from a state of pollution to one of purity by means of ritual, so too can the Land of Canaan. The transmutation of an area of land from its state of pollution to a purified territory relies on this ambiguity – the land remains the same in essence; behaviour patterns change, and in the minds of the inhabitants, the character of the place is thus altered and sanctified.

The laws of *qadosh* and *tameh* in these texts must have been ingrained in Durkheim's 'ethno-consciousness', his own 'collective representations'. Sociological commentators like Pickering, however, are inclined rather to consider the 'sacred' as 'an irreducible entity'.<sup>30</sup> He claims that 'Durkheim did not see the sacred as an isolated concept . . . for the sacred is to be understood, and only has meaning, by reason of its opposite, the profane. The sacred stands as one element in a dichotomous or binary system'.<sup>31</sup> Douglas makes a similar error when she writes: 'To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind. The dietary rules merely develop the metaphor of holiness on the same lines'.<sup>32</sup> This is a major misunderstanding of Durkheim as well as Robertson Smith, who also treated sacred and profane as two sides of the same coin, as it were. For Durkheim, both sacred and profane, and 'the pure and the impure are not two separate classes, but two varieties of the same class'.<sup>33</sup>

Lukes addresses a more subtle problem:

It is difficult to see how the dichotomy between sacred and profane can be reconciled with Durkheim's thesis (following Robertson Smith) that sacredness itself is ambiguous between the pure and the impure, the propitiously sacred and the unpropitiously sacred, such that there is a 'close kinship' between them, but also a contrast that is 'as complete as possible and even goes into the most radical antagonism', so that 'contact between them is considered the worst of profanations'. (How, for instance, is the impurely sacred to be distinguished from the profane, a sacred profanation from a profane profanation?)

(Lukes 1973: 27)

Lukes is right in recognizing a problem of ambiguity here, but the Biblical texts make subtle distinctions between *qadosh* and *chillul* that resolve the apparent contradictions. For example, the impurely sacred = *q'desha*, the cult prostitute,

is not the same as a sacred profanation = *chillul*, where the left-overs of a sacrifice of well-being are eaten by someone at a time which is forbidden, that is, on the third day – ‘for what is sacred to the Lord, he has profaned’ – *ki et qodesh adonai chillel*.<sup>34</sup> The scholar unfamiliar with the niceties of the original Hebrew will fail to unravel this mystery, while for Durkheim these subtleties were ingrained, almost second nature.

Lukes continues with a rational argument:

Part of the the whole trouble is that the dichotomy between sacred and profane, is, on the one hand, a radical distinction (assumed to be made by the religious believers) between classes of ‘things’ (including persons, situations, etc) of which some are ‘set apart’ from the rest; and, on the other hand, a distinction between the way men feel and act towards, and evaluate those things (such as whether or not they feel intense respect, or religious horror, or veneration, or love towards them). Now, clearly, the second distinction admits of degrees and situational flexibility; and, furthermore, it neither presupposes nor entails the first.

(Lukes 1973: 27)

### ***Qadosh and tameh***

Yet while his categories so clearly echo those of Biblical Judaism, Durkheim did not demonstrate the application of his model to Judaism itself. I shall sketch briefly what such an application might show, beginning with an analysis of the laws of purity and impurity.

### **Qadosh**

(a) God himself, set apart from other gods, is *qadosh*.

(b) The area surrounding the burning bush is *qadosh*. The bush that is not consumed by its own flames stands on earth that is sacred.<sup>35</sup> The voice of God comes from within the bush and commands Moses to remove the shoes from his feet; the interposition of material between his body and the holy ground is forbidden. A similar situation arises when Joshua, near the city of Jericho, is confronted by a military figure complete with drawn sword who identifies himself as ‘captain of the Lord’s host’.<sup>36</sup> Here, too, the ground where the message of God is delivered to man is *qadosh* – Joshua is commanded: ‘Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy’. Neither the burning bush itself, nor Jericho, is perceived as *qadosh* – only the area of ground upon which the message of God is received is separated off and consecrated.

(c) The firstborn male, man or beast, is *qadosh*.<sup>37</sup> The reasoning for this is ostensibly as follows: ‘When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, the first-born of both man and beast.

Therefore I sacrifice every first male issue of the womb, but redeem every first-born among my sons'.<sup>38</sup> No matter how many children or flocks and herds a man may have, the first-born male is separated from the other offspring, either by having to be redeemed, or sacrificed.

(d) The person who devotes him- or herself to God, for whatever reason and for whatever length of time, is called a *nazir* – a Nazirite, that is, one who is abstinent.<sup>39</sup> The condition is described in Numbers 6 and the *nazir* is consecrated, *qadosh*, to God. The *nazir* had to abstain from wine and strong drink, cutting of the hair was forbidden, as was contact with a corpse. Samson (Judges 13) was designated a Nazirite while still unborn, and his mother was forbidden vine products, wine and strong drink as well as food that was *tameh* – unclean. If a *nazir* was defiled by contact with a corpse, he was required to cleanse himself by means of a sin offering and a burnt offering, and was required to shave his head which then became *qadosh* by means of priestly intervention, and status as a *nazir* was resumed.<sup>40</sup> At the fulfilment of the days of consecration, the *nazir* was required to present a burnt offering, a sin offering, peace offerings and cereal and drink offerings to the Tent of Meeting. At the entrance, the *nazir* would shave his/her head – 'take the locks of his consecrated hair, and put them on the fire that is under the sacrifice of well-being'.<sup>41</sup> Only after the priest had carried out certain rituals, in which some of the offerings were 'holy for the priest', (that is, the priest was permitted to eat them) was the *nazir* permitted to drink wine.

(e) The sabbath is *qadosh*; 'On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a sabbath of complete rest, a sacred occasion'.<sup>42</sup> *Shabbat* is understood in the sense of cessation from creativity and emphasizes constraints on everyday activities – normal 'occupations'. In the unlimited chaos of creation, God has used time in a measured way – by numbering 'days' in order to describe the creation of the space, or universe, inhabited by humans and other creatures. He takes six 'days' to complete his creation and separates off the next day, calling it the sabbath, for rest and refreshment. Durkheim argues that 'the distinctive character of feast-days in all known religions is the cessation of work and the suspension of public and private life insofar as it does not have a religious objective'.<sup>43</sup>

(f) Sabbatical years and jubilee years are *qadosh*. Because the sabbath day is holy, therefore the sabbatical year is holy and the jubilee year (seven times seven) is holy: the land, like the people, observes a sabbath for God. The land belongs to God, and the people belong to God. The land has been given to the people, the people belong to the land, God belongs to the people. The concept of *qadosh* mediates between the three. The land is depicted in anthropomorphic terms – it will 'vomit' out the inhabitants if they do not follow the precepts laid down.<sup>44</sup>

(g) The 'fixed times' are also described as a 'sacred occasion', *miqra qodesh*: The feasts of Passover<sup>45</sup>, Weeks<sup>46</sup>, Tabernacles<sup>47</sup> and the ten days of penitence culminating in the Day of Atonement.<sup>48</sup> Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles are related to the agricultural seasons – Spring, First Fruits, Harvest. Before the



onset of autumn and the rainy season, the ten days of penitence and day of atonement are observed. This relates directly to the observations of Durkheim:

Since the apparent object, at least, of the cult was at first to regularize the course of natural phenomena, the rhythm of the cosmic life has put its mark on the rhythm of the ritual life. This is why the feasts have long been associated with the seasons . . .<sup>49</sup>

(Durkheim 1971: 349)

(h) The tithes (Leviticus 27) are *qadosh*: people, land, animals and houses could be consecrated to God. The act of consecrating such things was voluntary, therefore these things could be redeemed at an agreed price with the priest. The word *neder* – a vow – is used in connection with people, but the word *qodesh* is used with regard to property consecrated to God. But, no 'firstlings' could be voluntarily sanctified, because they belong to the Lord anyway. The word usage then changes to *cherem* – which has the double meaning of a ban and a votive offering, and the rule is that no person who has been so 'banned' may be redeemed. The importance of the tithes to the priestly tribe is elucidated in Leviticus 27: 20: 'And the Lord said to Aaron [a Levite]: You, however, shall have no territorial share among them or own any portion in their midst; I am your portion and your share among the Israelites. And to the Levites I hereby give all the tithes in Israel as their share in return for the services that they perform, the services of the Tent of Meeting. Henceforth, Israelites shall not trespass on the Tent of Meeting, and thus incur guilt and die: only Levites shall perform the services of the Tent of Meeting . . .'<sup>50</sup>

(i) The Tabernacle is a holy place, but within it, separated from the enclosed space within the Tabernacle, is another holy space, the 'most holy', *qodesh ha-qodashim*. A veil separates the two spaces.<sup>51</sup> Within the sanctuary are objects that are *qadosh*; holy oil and holy water are to be found: a lamp kindled with pure olive oil was set up in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain covering the Ark of the Pact. The holy anointing oil – *shemen mish'chat qodesh* – made of myrrh, cinnamon, aromatic cane, cassia and olive oil – was used for anointing the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Pact, the table and its vessels, the candlestick and its vessels, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and the large copper 'wash-basin'. The priests drew water from this basin, using it for washing their hands and feet before they entered the Tent of Meeting. All these vessels and therefore their contents were rendered holy by the action of anointing: 'Thus you shall consecrate them so that they may be most holy (*qodesh qodashim*); whatever touches them shall be consecrated. You shall also anoint Aaron and his sons, consecrating them to serve me as priests'.<sup>52</sup> No-one outside the priestly family was permitted to enter the sanctuary, and only the high priest was permitted to enter the holy of holies – the *qodesh haqodashim*. Water from the wash-basin – considered holy water – *mayyim q'doshim* – and dust – also considered *qadosh* – from the earth on the floor of the Tabernacle were used in



the ceremony of *sotah*, where a husband suspected his wife of going astray.<sup>53</sup> Women only were subject to this trial by ordeal and had to drink the water and dust in which the ink of a written curse had been dissolved by the priest in order to prove their guilt or innocence.

(j) When the high priest, Aaron, approached the holy place (tabernacle) with an offering for sacrifice, he wore holy garments. This separated him from other members of the congregation, and also indicated his increased purity – he bathed in holy water from the wash-basin before donning the holy garments and they were distinct from the clothing normally worn by the high priest.<sup>54</sup> The fabric of these garments probably breached the prohibition against mixing fibres. Linen was the basic material, but other threads in blue, purple, crimson and gold, were also used. This may be the basis of the rule of *sha'atnez* – an 'undue mixing': the priestly garments are holy when worn on the body of the priest and because, in his temple duties, he moves between the *chol* and the *qadosh*, between the mundane and the sacred, he is in a state of liminality and is permitted to wear a forbidden garment. When worn by a lay-person, a *sha'atnez* garment becomes profane.<sup>55</sup> The robe of blue worn by the priest was decorated on the hem with alternating motifs of pomegranates and bells. The bells would ensure that 'the sound of it is heard when he comes into the sanctuary before the Lord and when he goes out – that he may not die'. The sound of the bells would protect the priest. The headdress worn by the priest was decorated with a 'frontlet of pure gold', engraved with a seal inscription 'Holy to the Lord'.<sup>56</sup> When the High Priest and his sons were anointed and consecrated, holy anointing oil was used for 'the tabernacle and all that was therein' – *veyeqadesh otam* – 'and you shall consecrate them'. The priestly family were dressed in their holy garments, holy oil was sprinkled seven times upon the altar, and oil was poured on the High Priest's head – *vayim'shach oto l'qod'sho* – 'and you shall anoint him to consecrate him'.<sup>57</sup>

The ordination ceremony that followed was complicated and lengthy.<sup>58</sup> After a bullock (sin-offering) and a ram (burnt offering) had been slaughtered, their blood was dashed against the altar. The fat, liver and kidneys were burnt, and another ram, the ram of ordination, was slaughtered and its blood was used in a specific way: 'Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot'.<sup>59</sup> The same was done to Aaron's sons. The fat of the ram, together with a cereal offering was then burnt in an ordination offering. The remaining portion was divided between Aaron and his sons. The priests remained in the Tent of Meeting for seven days following the anointing and ordination ceremony during which time the altar was repeatedly consecrated, and daily sacrifices of young lambs were made.

(k) The temple in Jerusalem, like the temporary tabernacle in the wilderness, was a holy place, housing an even holier place, the *qodesh haqodashim*, also called the *d'vir*.<sup>60</sup> God himself sanctified this holy temple in the same way as he sanctified the sabbath day, setting it apart from the other days of the week,

merely by the enunciation of his own, supremely authoritative words. When the ark containing the two tablets of the ten commandments were placed in the *d'vir* of Solomon's Temple,

the priests came out of the sanctuary – for the cloud had filled the House of the Lord and the priests were not able to remain and perform the service because of the cloud, for the Presence of the Lord filled the House of the Lord – then Solomon declared: The Lord has chosen to abide in a thick cloud: I have now built for you a stately House, a place where You may dwell forever.

(I Kings 8: 10)

Neusner has pointed out that

the priestly writers in Leviticus take for granted that sacrifice to the Lord may take place in any appropriate holy place, while the authorship of the Book of Deuteronomy insists that sacrifice may take place only in the place that God will designate, by which Jerusalem's Temple is meant.

(Neusner 1990: 27 n. 1)

The obligatory offerings are *qodesh qodashim* and represent 'high quality' in that the animals are all without blemish and represent atonement for sin. Three other types of offerings are designated 'free will offerings'; two are *qodesh qodashim*, while the peace offering, not as holy as a 'cereal' or 'burnt' offering, is *qodesh kal*. The burnt offering is totally consumed in flames, while half of the cereal offering provides food for the priests.<sup>61</sup>

God has chosen above all things, to make Himself *qadosh*. He is the ineffable, invisible, omnipotent, immortal deity, and it is clear that most things which are *qadosh* are set apart simply because He has chosen them to be so, such as the seventh day (a time), or they are directly associated with Him, like the area of earth surrounding the burning bush (a place). The vessels in the sanctuary become *qadosh*, however, because they have been anointed with sacred oils, as are the priests during their lengthy ordination ceremony. People and objects are rendered 'sanctified' by contact with a sacred substance.<sup>62</sup>

### **Tameh**

The condition of being *tameh* indicates the 'separateness' and isolation inherent in ritual pollution, but without any implicit undertone of *qadosh*. The explicit nature of *tameh* is distant from godly attributes and contrasts strongly with ideas of *qadosh* because it deals with bodily functions, sickness and death. Examples of things that are considered to be *tameh* are essentially facets of life that are unavoidable. Yet purification is required if the correct and acceptable social

*modus vivendi* is to be perpetuated in holiness.<sup>63</sup> Durkheim wrote that 'the rhythm which the religious life follows only expresses the rhythm of the social life and results from it'.<sup>64</sup> The universal and mundane facts of human existence may be said to spring from the actions of the bodies of men and women as they reproduce the society in which they live.

A woman after childbirth is *tameh*, and after giving birth to a son, she is impure for seven days (*niddah*) and thirty-three days of blood purification (*d'mei tahara*). After giving birth to a daughter, she is impure for fourteen days and sixty-six days of blood purification.<sup>65</sup> Genital discharge from a male likewise generates ritual pollution.<sup>66</sup> Seven days must pass, and the man washes his clothes, bathes his body in fresh water and is then clean. He also takes sin and burnt offerings to the priest.<sup>67</sup> Before receiving the ten commandments from God on Mount Sinai, the people were sanctified by Moses. They also washed their clothing and were forbidden to have sexual intercourse. The injunction was: '... do not go near a woman'.<sup>68</sup> Leviticus 15: 19 deals with the menstruant.<sup>69</sup> If a woman has an abnormal bleed it generates the same polluting state as a man's genital discharge, together with the prohibitions attached to it.<sup>70</sup>

*Tzara'at* has been translated as 'leprosy' but it covers various types of skin lesions and the condition is highly polluting. Touching a person who has *tzara'at* causes impurity. A white fabric could also be *tameh* with *tzara'at*, as could a building. If the *tzara'at* spread, the fabric was to be burned, and the building was destroyed. Lewis has concentrated on the type of *tzara'at* which pertains to the skin, associating the affliction with sin and guilt, but he does not deal fully with the fact that clothing or houses affected with fungus or moulds are also infected by *tzara'at*.<sup>71</sup> In the biblical texts however, and consequently in the social context, neither the body, nor its clothing, nor its dwelling, is privileged in this instance.

Any person touching the carcass of an unclean creature was required to 'wash his clothes, and be unclean until the evening'.<sup>72</sup> A wooden vessel or item of clothing, or material of skin or sacking that had been in contact with the corpse of an unclean creature had to be washed in water before it was considered clean again. An earthen vessel had to be destroyed, and all food and drink that had been in contact with it was unclean. Impurity was caused by touching the corpses of eight types of 'swarming' animals, *shmonah shratzim*, such as mice and lizards.<sup>73</sup> The *shratzim* are not considered lethal to humans or other large animals. However, snakes or scorpions, which are able to kill, are labelled *detestable, sheqetz*, but their corpses do not contaminate. They do not fall under the category of *sherez*, nor are they large animals; the snake creeps upon its belly and the scorpion has many legs.<sup>74</sup>

### Purification and sacrificial ceremonies

The significance of the body itself is emphasized in the performance of holy rituals. The priests at the sanctuary were the mediators between the state of

*tameh* and the state of *tahor* and carried out sacrifices on behalf of the people. The priests (*Kohanim*) were of the tribe of Levi, and were holier than the main body of Levites, having been anointed with holy oil and sanctified. The Levites were also separated from the other eleven tribes – they received no inheritance of land in Canaan, but were given certain rights of property and sustenance. They were the vehicles through which the blessing of God was given to the people as a whole. References to the body in the priestly blessing show the anthropomorphic terms in which the Israelites viewed their god: 'The Lord bless you and protect you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance to you and grant you peace'.<sup>75</sup>

Before the services in the sanctuary, the Levites were purified with the ashes of a red heifer, their body hair was shaved and they then offered sacrifices. Altars on which sacrifices were to be made were of earth, but if stones were used, they could not be hewn stones, 'for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them'.<sup>76</sup>

Purification ceremonies involved the use of (a) fire, and animal offerings (b) animal blood,<sup>77</sup> (c) water, (d) a mixture of animal blood and running water, (e) living water, that is, fresh running water such as rainwater, the waters of a stream (*mayyim chayyim*) or springwater (*miqveh mayyim*), that is, water that has collected in a natural, not artificial, manner,<sup>78</sup> (f) a mixture of ashes and water, (g) oil, (h) flour (cereal, usually wheat or barley), (i) scarlet thread and (j) incense.

Durkheim acknowledged Robertson Smith's revolutionary contribution to the theory of sacrifice:

Before him sacrifice was regarded as a sort of tribute or homage, either obligatory or optional, analogous to that which subjects owe to their princes. Robertson Smith was the first to remark that this classic explanation did not account for two essential characteristics of the rite. In the first place, it is a repast: its substance is food. Secondly, it is a repast in which the worshippers who offer it take part, along with the god to whom it is offered. . . . From this point of view, sacrifice takes on a wholly new aspect. Its essential element is no longer the act of renouncement which the word sacrifice ordinarily expresses; before all, it is an act of alimentary communion.

(Durkheim 1971: 336)

Robertson Smith recognized that the communal meal shared between the worshipper and the god creates a bond of kinship. He went on, however, to emphasize that the food eaten at these meals was transformed ritually, and made sacred. The rituals of the Levites, 'preliminary operations, lustrations, unctions, prayers, etc. . . . transform the animal to be immolated into a sacred thing, whose sacredness is subsequently transferred to the worshipper who eats it'.<sup>79</sup>

Animals that were to be sacrificed had to be *tamim*, without blemish. Bulls, cows, goats, rams and ewes, pigeons and turtledoves could be sacrificed. The

person bringing the sacrificial animal to the Tent of Meeting would lay his hand upon the head of the offering (if not a bird) and it would be accepted for sacrifice. When the animal had been slaughtered, the priest would dash its blood upon the altar situated at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. No leaven or honey was permitted in the sacrifice, and a cereal offering was seasoned with salt, as were the animal sacrifices. Fruit was not offered upon the altar.

If commandments were unwittingly flouted

through the inadvertence of the community, the whole community shall present one bull of the herd as a burnt offering . . . and one he-goat as a sin offering. The priest shall make expiation for the whole Israelite community and they shall be forgiven; for it was an error, and for their error they have brought their offering . . . the whole Israelite community and the stranger residing among them shall be forgiven, for it happened to the entire people through error. . . . In case it is an individual who has sinned unwittingly, he shall offer a she-goat in its first year as a sin offering . . . for the citizen among the Israelites and for the stranger who resides among them – you shall have one ritual for anyone who acts in error.

(Numbers 15: 24ff.)

Durkheim was clearly influenced by this idea; piacular rites had a 'stimulating power over the affective state of the group and individuals' and neglect in performing such acts caused severe retribution, 'anger . . . acutely felt by all'.<sup>80</sup>

The sin offering of a priest was a young bullock, and its blood was sprinkled seven times in front of the veil of the sanctuary, and blood was smeared upon the altar of sweet incense in the Tent of Meeting. The remaining blood was poured out at the base of the altar situated at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The kidneys, liver and fat surrounding the intestines were burnt, but the skin, flesh, head and legs, intestines and dung were burnt outside the camp at a 'clean place' – *maqom tahor* – where ashes from the altar were placed. Eating of this flesh was prohibited. The same applied to a communal sin offering, and the sin offering of a prince or ruler. If one of the people, *am ha-aretz*, sinned, the offering was a female goat or lamb or two birds, or a cereal-offering. Another type of sin offering, where the sin was unintentional, was called a guilt offering. Similar rituals took place for this. Exodus 24: 6ff. illustrates this use of blood in the ritual of the burnt offering – in this case, bulls, which are offerings of well-being. 'Moses took one part of the blood and put it in basins, and the other part of the blood he dashed against the altar. Then he took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people'. The people promised to obey the commandments, and then Moses took the rest of the blood and dashed it on the people, symbolically sealing the covenant between God and the people.<sup>81</sup>

If the sacrifice was an *olah*, the animal would be a male, without blemish, and the entire beast would be burnt – this was *qodesh qodashim*, as was a bird,

where the crop and feathers would be removed and the entire bird would be burnt. The cereal offering was *godesh qodashim*, and half would be eaten by the priests. Any other food that came into contact with the holy food also became holy. The peace offering could be a male or a female animal, but not a bird; again, the blood would be dashed at the base of the altar and the kidneys, liver and fat surrounding the intestines would be burnt. The remainder of the flesh could be eaten by the offerer and his family.

The book of Numbers describes the purification of warriors after battle. Purification was required after touching the slain, and garments of skin and wool and implements of wood were to be purified.

This is the ritual law that the Lord has enjoined upon Moses: gold and silver, copper, iron, tin, and lead – any article that can withstand fire – these you shall pass through fire and they shall be clean, except that they must be cleansed with water of lustration, or sprinkling (*me' niddah*); and anything that cannot withstand fire you must pass through water. On the seventh day you shall wash your clothes and be clean, and after that you may enter the camp.

(Numbers 31: 19ff.)

To purify a *metzora* – a person with *tzara'at* (biblical leprosy) – the priest would perform a rite after the blemished person had been banished from the camp for a week in solitary confinement. The rite involved the use of two birds of the same species, a red thread, a cedar twig and hyssop and water. The priest would go outside the camp to inspect the person, and if the blemish had disappeared, the purification period of eight days would commence. One of the birds would be slaughtered over an earthenware bowl filled with fresh spring water, and the blood would be squeezed into the bowl. Using the red thread to tie together the cedar wood and the hyssop, the priest would dip this into the bloody water together with the living bird. Then he would sprinkle some of the water seven times on the *metzora*. The living bird would be set free.<sup>82</sup> All the hair on the *metzora*'s body was shaved after which he washed himself and his clothes in water.<sup>83</sup> After seven days the *metzora* would again bathe in water and wash his clothes after he had been shaved a second time by the priest.

On the Day of Atonement, a similar ceremony took place, using two goats – one for the Lord and one for the precipitous place – *azazel*. The latter was pushed over a cliff as a 'scapegoat' to atone for communal sins, while the former was sacrificed as a sin offering and its blood was sprinkled in the *godesh haqodashim*. The high priest entered the *godesh haqodashim* four times during the Day of Atonement: first to burn incense, secondly to sprinkle the sacrificial bull's blood seven times downwards and once upwards, thirdly to sprinkle the goat's blood, once again seven times downwards and once upwards. A mixture of bull's and goat's blood was then smeared on the holy incense altar and sprinkled seven times on the surface of the altar.<sup>84</sup> The high

priest's fourth entry to the *qodesh haqodashim* was to remove the vessels for burning the incense.

Although most sacrifices utilized bulls, rams, lambs and goats – male creatures – the sacrifice of a cow was used specifically for purification of highly polluting states. Contact with a corpse was the primary source of *tum'ah*, ritual pollution; a priest was not permitted to touch a corpse, unless it was that of his wife, parent, child, brother or unmarried sister. However even the high priest was permitted to touch an unidentified Israelite corpse – it had to be buried, simply because of the prohibition on delay when dealing with any corpse, even that of the wrong-doer.<sup>85</sup>

Purification from corpse-impurity was thus a most important rite, given the ubiquitous presence of corpses in everyday life and particularly during the period of war and violence which is described in scriptural texts. The ceremony using the ashes of the red heifer was to purify those who had come into contact with a corpse, either directly on the field of battle, or merely by being present in the enclosed area of death when it took place in the home; even contact with a bone of a corpse caused ritual impurity. The *parah adumah* – red heifer – was an unusual animal; she had no blemish and her hide was absolutely red.

*Water* was used for purification in the states of uncleanness not associated with bloodshed or slaughter; *blood* was used for atonement or protection. The skin, blood, flesh and dung of the red heifer were burnt, and the ashes mixed with running water (*mayyim hayyim* – living waters) to serve as the purifying medium for corpse-pollution. The burnt blood of the heifer acted against the impurity caused by contact with 'blood', the dominant symbol of life and death, inasmuch as blood must never be eaten, and the term 'blood guilt' was used in cases of death by murder. The red of the heifer symbolized sin and the significance of fire in the burning ceremony became combined with the purifying action of water in the mixture of ashes and water, providing a double efficacy in the purification rite; a symbolic combination of fire and water was marshalled against the contagion of contact with a dead body.

Durkheim reflected on

how the energy and force of expansion which they [that is, 'good' and 'evil'] have in common do not enable us to understand how, in spite of the conflict which divides them, they may be transformed into one another or substituted for each other in their respective functions, and how the pure may contaminate while the impure sometimes serves to sanctify.

(Durkheim 1971: 412)

Durkheim's explanation of substitution in sacrifice is exemplified in the case of the red heifer; '... we cannot doubt that the expiatory victim was charged with the impurity of the sin'.<sup>86</sup> Even though the animal itself was *t'mimah* (unblemished), the clean person who carried out the rite of burning the heifer together



with cedarwood, hyssop and scarlet thread then became unclean, as was the priest who participated in the ceremony. They were both required to wash and were unclean until the evening. Another clean man (*tahor*) had then to remove the ashes to a clean place, whereupon he too had become unclean (*tameh*) and had to wash himself and his clothes and was unclean until the evening. The ashes were then mixed with running water in a bowl, and used in the powerful cleansing rite that countered pollution from a corpse.

It becomes apparent that because God himself is set apart, *qadosh*, the people who follow his ways are also *qadosh*; not only the 'common' but also the impure are opposed to the sacred. Ritual impurity can be removed by priestly intervention. That which is innately *tameh*, such as the corpse of an unclean animal, cannot be purified; but the person who has come into contact with the *tameh* can be purified. The contagion of the *tameh* spreads by touch, just as the holiness of the sacred anointing oil renders that which it touches *qadosh*.

### Impurity and sin

There is a complex but marked contrast between being ritually impure and being a sinner, one that is often misconstrued by commentators in the Christian tradition. States of purity and impurity and the condition of being 'set apart' are distinct from ideas of sin and atonement. There are specific punishments allocated to particular acts of commission or omission. Large-scale idolatry will ultimately lead to exile from the land. Adultery will lead to being stoned to death. Omitting to undergo a purification ceremony will result in being 'cut off from the congregation'. There is considerable difference, therefore, between sins of idolatry, murder or adultery and the requirement to bring an offering to the priest at the tabernacle as part of a purification ritual. Although the offerings for purification after ritual impurity may be 'sin' offerings, states of ritual impurity are associated with social, not physical death. Actions recognized as potentially destructive of the fabric of society, like murder, incest and adultery, are sins that are linked to death.

Lewis has pointed out that sin offerings are required for

inadvertent sins, not wilful sin; rebelliously or presumptuously to break commandments would merit death. The 'sins' which require the sin-offering are inadvertent transgressions and include the conditions of ritual impurity. Sin in this sense includes defilement and uncleanness. It is the action or the state which matters, not intention. The laws and rules are like taboos. Sin and uncleanness are conflated.

(Lewis 1987: 606)

The fact is that actual, physical death should result from certain acts, whereas a temporary, social 'death' is the result of a skin eruption, a non-seminal discharge



and corpse contamination. Being excluded from the camp for seven or fourteen days is not the same as being stoned to death. Unfortunately Lewis has quoted Deuteronomy 30<sup>87</sup>, regarding worship of other gods and exile (the connection is clear in the passage) in the context of leprosy, and not, as should be expected, with idol worship.<sup>88</sup> Douglas associates leprosy with idol worship and death.<sup>89</sup> Again, Lewis states:

Leviticus does not judge the leper morally, but it defines him as one of the category of persons and things which are ritually impure. As Brody (1974 pp 111–12) points out, although there is no explicit moral condemnation of the man found to be leprous, the terms for moral valuation are all there in the text. Leviticus does not deny that leprosy is a punishment for sin; it simply ignores the idea.

(Lewis 1987: 598)

I disagree with Brody – I do not think that ‘the terms for moral valuation’ *are* ‘all there in the text’. The whole point about states of ritual impurity like having sexual intercourse and being unclean, or menstruating and being unclean, or having *tzara‘at*, is that there is no moral condemnation. Lewis writes that ‘ideas of pollution and sin both touch leprosy and time has tangled them all up’, but he himself has tangled up some of the ideas.<sup>90</sup> He quotes Leviticus 18: 24–5: ‘Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things; for in all these the nations are defiled, which I cast out before you. And the land was defiled, therefore did I visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land vomited out her inhabitants’. This is taken out of context. Lewis links it with ‘why must the leper be kept outside the camp’, but in Leviticus, the particular verse quoted follows directly after the verses about ‘uncovering nakedness’ – that is, incest with mother, father, son, daughter, etc. – or marrying two sisters, or having sex with a menstruant, or adultery, bestiality and male homosexual acts. He has conflated leprosy with the ‘iniquity’ of adultery and incest.

In sum, Lewis<sup>91</sup> and Douglas<sup>92</sup> place great emphasis on the life–death dichotomy in analysing ritual pollution and ritual purity. This appears to me to be an assumption that is deeply influenced by post-biblical ideas of salvation and afterlife. Lewis conflates life with good and death with evil;<sup>93</sup> but life is not *tahor*, nor is death *tameh*. The Pentateuch reverberates with the effects of the continuous movement between waywardness and faith, of people who are both obedient and disobedient to the word of God, and who move between states of ritual impurity and ritual purity. The leper calls out ‘unclean, unclean’ – *tameh, tameh* – not ‘death, death’; he is unclean ‘as long as the plague (or affliction) is on him’. Miriam was struck with skin eruption not for idolatry, but because of her slander against Moses regarding his Midianite wife. ‘Lepers’ could be rehabilitated and purified, corpses must be dealt with and buried swiftly. It is contact with a corpse that causes impurity; the living person with a genital discharge is *tameh*; the menstruating woman is *tameh*. Eilberg-Schwartz suggests ‘that the

priestly rules governing bodily emissions constitute a subsystem of a larger set of prohibitions that express a distinction between life and death. . . . However, there are some anomalies that stubbornly resist this symbolic interpretation';<sup>94</sup> and Lewis does argue that 'A spiritual afterlife is no issue in the Covenant'.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, Neusner asserts: 'the first stage in the formation of the dual Torah attended to sanctification, the second to salvation'.<sup>96</sup> If there are overtones of dread of death, these surely refer to social death, as in being 'cut off' without heir, but not spiritual death.

My interpretation, therefore, would be that ritual purity, ritual pollution, sacrifice and holiness are so much a part of everyday events in the world created by the ancient Hebrews that their God's interest in these states reflects his interest in daily personal behaviour. Although God is 'set apart', he invests much of this characteristic of himself into the significance of daily personal and communal actions and offerings. By obeying the laws and being *tahor*, provision is made for being *qadosh*. Ancient Judaism hinges on notions of things that are 'set apart' and sacred, as opposed to things that are 'common' or 'profane', in addition to things that are 'pure' as opposed to those that are 'impure'. These concepts, so central in Durkheim's theory of religion, fit Judaism well, and probably derive from it.

## SACRIFICE AND PRAYER IN ISRAELITE RELIGION

For an Israelite, sacrificial performance led towards the transcendent. It was the way to be *qadosh*, a proper member of the nation that had been exhorted by its God to become ‘a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation’.<sup>1</sup> To be eligible to offer voluntary or obligatory sacrifices required the ritual laundering of clothes and ritual immersions of the body itself. Sacrificial food was enjoyed by the priestly cohort and, in particular circumstances, also shared by those who provided the sacrificial offerings. The symbolic feeding of God took place every day at the Temple, so that he could enjoy ‘the sweet savour’ of the smoking flesh, fat and entrails; it was ‘the food of the offering made by fire to the Lord’.<sup>2</sup>

While the Children of Israel wandered in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt and before Joshua’s conquest of the land of Canaan, rituals of sacrifice took place as communal ceremonies as well as personal rites. The formal place of sacrifice was the Tabernacle, which was the centre of the cult, both in the wilderness and in Canaan until the Temple was built by King Solomon in Jerusalem around 950 BCE. Domesticated creatures were sacrificed upon a fire that was continually fed, so that even on the Sabbath and Festivals there was neither a ‘hunt’ nor a deliberate creation of new fire. The sacrifice was sometimes an *olah*, the offering that ‘ascended’ and was completely burnt, or was a meal shared with the Priests, as food eaten in communion with God. Regular sacrifice, the *tamid*, took place twice daily, before daybreak and as evening approached. Sacrifices also marked the Sabbath, New Moon and the holy seasons, *miqra’ei qodesh*, the agricultural pilgrim festivals of Passover, Weeks and Booths (*pesach, shavuot and sukkot*), the New Year (later called *Rosh ha-Shana*) and Day of Atonement (*Yom ha-Kippurim*). The destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE and again in CE 70 resulted in the cessation of the priestly cult.

According to the Torah, the first offerings to God came from the sons of Adam and Eve, the brothers Cain and Abel; ‘Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil; and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock’.<sup>3</sup> God preferred the shepherd’s offering, which involved the death of a lamb. God also accepted Noah’s burnt offerings, at the same time recognizing the waywardness of humankind. ‘The Lord smelled the pleasing

odour, and the Lord said to Himself: “Never again will I doom the earth because of man, because the devisings of man’s mind are evil from his youth.”<sup>4</sup> That is to say, human nature seems to be imbued with the ability to perform both good and evil deeds and the text indicates that God, creator of good and evil, accepts this fallibility in his creation of men and women. The verse appears to herald Talmudic concepts such as the ‘good’ or ‘evil’ inclination, and freedom of choice, even though Pharisaic doctrine held that God ultimately predestines all.

The idea of ‘negotiating’ with the deity became integral to the idea of a sacrificial offering of thanksgiving. The ordinary person could engage in this negotiation only via the sacred offerings; but the extraordinary people, like Abraham and Moses, are described as negotiating with God in a manner that indicates exactly how anthropomorphosized God was. For example, when God saw the wickedness of the city of Sodom, He decided to destroy it. ‘And the Lord said: If I find in Sodom fifty righteous [*tzadiqim*] within the city then I will forgive all the place for their sake’.<sup>5</sup> Abraham negotiated for the lives of the righteous citizens in the city. If there were forty-five righteous people in the city, would God still wish to destroy it? Supposing there were forty, thirty, twenty, ten? Eventually God capitulates: ‘I will not destroy it for the ten’s sake’. However, not even ten righteous people were to be found, so fire and brimstone hailed down and the town was destroyed; but Lot, his wife and his daughters were led to safety from the town by angels.

Moses, too, was able to negotiate with God after the people fashioned and worshipped the golden calf. He urged God not to annihilate ‘your very own people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. Let not the Egyptians say, “It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth”’.<sup>6</sup> Moses had to persuade God to keep faith with the people but also had to persuade the people to trust in God, encouraging them to remain loyal despite all their hardships in the wilderness:

Remember the long way that the Lord your God has made you travel in the wilderness these past forty years – He subjected you to the hardship of hunger and then gave you manna to eat . . . in order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but that man may live on anything that the Lord decrees . . . God disciplines you just as a man disciplines his son.

(Deuteronomy 8: 2–5)

The image of the paternal Hebrew God was reinforced in a relationship of dependence and trust. But the threat was implicit; deny God and He will deny you all the good things in life, which is always an earthly, family life dependent upon agriculture and pastoralism.<sup>7</sup>

In order to elucidate the significance of Early Israelite sacrificial offerings, I shall focus on the following topics: the priests, or mediators of the offering; the

nature of the sacrificial offering; the reasons why a person was required to make an offering; the ritual itself, utilizing blood as a purifying substance.

## The priests

### *Their receipt of 'gifts'*

Within the tribe of the Levites, the *kohanim* served as priests. The priesthood was 'a service of dedication' and the Lord placed in the hands of the High Priest Aaron and the priestly family all gifts to God. These sacred donations made by the Israelites were designated as *herem*, or proscribed:

This shall be yours from the most holy sacrifices, the offerings by fire [*qorban*]: every such offering that they render to Me as most holy sacrifices, namely, every meal offering, sin offering and guilt offering . . . shall belong to you and your sons. You shall partake of them as most sacred donations: only males may eat them; you shall treat them as consecrated. This, too, shall be yours: the heave offering [*terumot*] of their gift and all the wave offerings [*tenufot*] of the Israelites, I give to you, to your sons, and to the daughters that are with you, as a due for all time; everyone of your household who is clean [*tahor*] may eat it. All the best of the new oil, wine, and grain – the choice parts that they present to the Lord – I give to you. . . . Everything that has been proscribed [*herem*] in Israel shall be yours.

(Numbers 18: 7ff.)

So within the Tabernacle or Temple, the priests benefited from some of the offerings, while other offerings were eaten by both the priest and the person who offered the sacrificial animal. Significantly, sharing food with the priest and the deity was a privilege only in the case of the peace offering, where there was no specific mandatory requirement to appear with an offering.<sup>8</sup>

Because the Levites received no portion of land when Canaan was divided between the tribes, the system of tithing, *ma'aser*, ensured that they would receive agricultural produce and cattle: 'For it is the tithes set aside by the Israelites as a gift to the Lord that I give to the Levites as their share'.<sup>9</sup> This share extended to the forty-eight Levitical cities, each with land attached, which were set aside for the support of the Levites. The Levites had the right to live in the cities, but the cities themselves belonged to the tribe in whose territory they were situated.

### *The physical purity of the priests*

The God of the Ancient Hebrews was to be emulated in his state of holiness, and in actions leading to holiness. For example, because God rested on the seventh

day after creation, the rule of Sabbath rest was to be obeyed by His people; and, because God was *qadosh*, that is, separated from other gods, His people were to keep themselves separate from other peoples in certain aspects. The God of the Israelites was invisible, and His ‘formlessness’ in appearing as a column of fire or as a cloud could have been perceived as a kind of amorphous, ‘living’ perfection. Even though God manifested His perfection in natural phenomena that were, under the circumstances, unusual, this was an epiphany witnessed only by those who wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Subsequently, those who wished to approach and draw near to Him were to be ritually pure, and their sacrificial animals were to be without blemish.<sup>10</sup> Just as significantly, the attributes required for legitimate priesthood were those of ritual purity and physical perfection:

Speak to Aaron and say: ‘No man of your offspring [that is, a Levitical priest] throughout the ages who has a defect, shall be qualified to offer the food of his God. No one at all who has a defect shall be qualified: no man who is blind, or lame, or mutilated, or has a limb too short or too long; no man that has a broken leg, or a broken arm: or who is a hunchback, or a dwarf, or who has a growth in his eye, or who has a boil-scar, or scurvy, or crushed testes. No man among the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a defect shall be qualified to offer the Lord’s offering by fire; having a defect he shall not be qualified to offer the food of his God.’

(Leviticus 21: 17)

Josephus describes a scene that illustrates how this tradition retained its significance even during the late Second Temple period. The long-standing rivalry between Rome and Parthia was manifested and symbolized by personal rivalry between two Hasmonean candidates for the joint position of High Priest and Ethnarch. Caesar had appointed Hyrcanus, while the Parthians backed Antigonus, his nephew. In his battle with the Parthians, Herod fared badly and retreated to Masada. The victorious Parthians delivered the fettered Hyrcanus to Antigonus, and the ambitious nephew exercised his will over his uncle:<sup>11</sup> ‘When Hyrcanus fell down at his feet, Antigonus with his own teeth mutilated his ears, in order that he might never again resume the high priesthood in any circumstances; for a high priest must be physically perfect’.<sup>12</sup>

The ‘defective’ priest could eat God’s food, both the holy and the most holy, but was not permitted to go behind the veil or approach the altar – ‘He shall not profane these places sacred to Me, for I the Lord have sanctified them’. Following on from the original precept that physical as well as ritual perfection was required, we read: ‘No man of Aaron’s offspring who has an eruption [*tzaru ʿa*] or a discharge [*zav*] shall eat of the sacred donations until he is clean’.<sup>13</sup> Lewis posits a polar opposition between the high priest and nazirite as typically most holy, while the leper represents ‘their antitype’.<sup>14</sup> The nazirite, *nazir*, has been

described as a 'devotee who, not content with observing what is obligatory, seeks austere modes of self-dedication' involving abstention from alcohol, avoidance of contact with a corpse and refraining from cutting of the hair.<sup>15</sup> The leper, *tzaru'a* or *metzora*, however, was considered temporarily blemished, yet it was obviously possible that a priest could equally suffer the skin lesions of the leper. But once the ceremony of cleansing had taken place and offerings had been made, the priest-leper would then be clean and ritually pure – *tahor*.

### The sacrificial offering

The sacrificial offerings consisted of cereals, wine and oil, and the slaughter of domestic animals was sometimes followed by consumption of the flesh. Smearing and sprinkling or throwing (dashing) of animal blood was an integral part of the rite. The terminology describing some of the sacrificial offerings appears to suggest that notions of guilt and sin motivated the act of sacrifice. The offerings made by the Early Israelites could be voluntary or obligatory and the latter were particularly associated with various procedures in specific circumstances. Certain social situations required the ritual sacrifice of domestic animals or birds, while other situations demanded a toll in human life-blood. Regulation of individual bodily functions required a socially determined ritual sacrifice. These bodily functions centred on notions of ritual purity and pollution. The social situations that required more than just a symbolic offering of animal life-blood were those in which human bodies and their possessions had been violated.

The two categories, personal impurity and public discord, bring to mind Durkheim's assertion that 'man is double' – that man has a biological as well as a social existence.<sup>16</sup> The biological realities of ritual impurity were mediated symbolically by the loss of a sacrificed animal's life, while the social misdemeanour of murder meant that the perpetrator could lose his or her life. In Early Israelite sacrificial rites, animal blood was spilt and used as a purging substance to expunge say, personal ritual pollution; in a case of intentional murder, the spilling of the blood of the victim required restitution with the spilling of the human blood of the perpetrator. Because ritual impurity was envisaged as 'a state of being', and personal motives and intentions could not influence that state, factors other than ritual impurity must therefore come into play when considering the code of behaviour, where motive is crucial.

Durkheim perceived the sacrificial offering as based on the idea of a bargain struck between 'the man and the divinity', and he asserted that this idea could, in fact, only have been born 'in the great religions, where the gods, *removed* from the things with which they were primitively confused, were thought of as sorts of kings and the eminent proprietors of the earth and its products'.<sup>17</sup>

Durkheim is obviously influenced by the Israelite notion of God, the divine owner of the land of Canaan, the source of sustenance on earth, who was a force to be reckoned with. He differs here from Robertson Smith, from whom he took so many of his ideas about ritual, for Robertson Smith denied that sacrifices

were payments made in a process of negotiating with God, at least in the early biblical period.

Robertson Smith maintained that the essence of Semitic sacrificial rites was the desire to join with the gods in a communion of commensality. He distinguished two main types of Levitical sacrifice with reference to the sacrificial object: the *minha*, which represented a tribute from the produce of the soil, and the *zebah* [*zevach*], which represented a communal meal consisting of the flesh of an animal victim. But whatever the object offered, the fundamental idea of ancient sacrifice was a holy communion.

We may now take it as made out that, throughout the Semitic field, the fundamental idea of sacrifice is not that of a sacred tribute but of communion between the god and his worshippers by joint participation in the living flesh and blood of a sacred victim.

(Robertson Smith 1972: 345)

Sacrifices could, however, also be classified by function into piacular and ordinary offerings: 'The former were not so much sacrifice for sin, as sacrifices in which the ceremonial forms . . . continued to express the original idea that the victim's life was sacrosanct, and . . . cognate to the life of the god and his worshippers'.<sup>18</sup>

Robertson Smith observed that it was common, when examining the piacular ritual, to assume that piacula were atonements for sin, and to assume that the ritual signified the purchase of divine forgiveness. Then he challenged this assumption:

But this is to take the thing by the wrong handle. The characteristic features in piacular sacrifice are not the invention of a later age, in which the sense of sin and divine wrath was strong, but are features carried over from a very primitive type of religion, in which the sense of sin, in any proper sense of the word, did not exist at all, and the whole object of ritual was to maintain the bond of physical holiness that kept the religious community together. . . . Thus, among the Hebrews of the pre-prophetic period, it certainly appears that a peculiar potency was assigned to holocausts and other exceptional sacrifices . . . on the other hand, sacrifices of piacular form and force were offered on many occasions when we cannot suppose the sense of sin or of divine anger to have been present in any extraordinary degree.

(Robertson Smith 1972: 401–2)

Robertson Smith thus perceived a motive devoid of any notion of bargaining, rather of *piare*, pacifying or appeasing the deity. The sacrifice called the *olah*, the burnt offering, where none of the food was shared with God, was of the 'holocaust' type – God alone enjoyed the complete offering. The voluntary *olah*



was ‘most holy’, *qodesh qodashim*. The cereal, or ‘meal’ offering, also a voluntary offering, fell into the same category, ‘most holy’, but half was consumed in the flames and half was eaten by the priests. The *shelamim*, the voluntary ‘peace offering’, of which more later, was *qodesh kal*, less holy an offering than the other voluntary offerings, and again some was burnt, but the remainder was eaten by both priest and offerer. It is difficult, therefore, to classify sacrifices in terms of their ‘bargaining’ capacity or their ‘piacular’ capacity on grounds of degrees of ‘holiness’, or whether or not the entire offering was burnt or who was allowed to eat this holy food. Suffice to say that the *olah* served as the daily food for the god ‘always’, *tamid*, and this continual sacrificial rite was observed even in the last weeks of the Second Temple period, during the most awful days of the war with Rome.<sup>19</sup> However, sacrificial rituals among the Early Israelites were varied, fulfilling different purposes, some of which certainly appear to have been made with a contract or negotiation of sorts as a rationale.

Early Israelite sacrificial offerings reflected the fervent wish for proximity to the deity by means of offerings of animal blood and other substances, such as human hair, spices and aromatic incense. ‘All offerings (*korban*) are things “brought nearer to” God – this is the literal sense of *korban*’.<sup>20</sup> Thus the sense of sacrifice found in the Early Israelite tradition was that of an offering, or a gift, where the offering involved ‘drawing near’ to an altar and, in most instances, burning something on it. *Zevach*, the word used to convey the idea of the sacrificial offering, has as its root the implication of ritual slaughter, as opposed to a butcher’s mundane ‘cut that kills’; related to this is the word for altar – *mizbe’ach*. The *olah*, or ‘burnt’ offering was voluntary, as was the cereal and oil mixture called the *mincha*, where ritual slaughter did not take place, and the offering was literally ‘laid down’ as a gift to God. ‘In short, while the *zevach* turns on an act of communion between the deity and his worshippers, [the cereal, or meal offering, i.e.] *mincha* (as its name denotes) is simply a tribute’.<sup>21</sup> The *shelamim*, also voluntary, a ‘peace’ offering, or offering of ‘well-being’, has various interpretations – the root, *sh-l-m*, is taken as *shalom* in the case of the peace offering, while the *shelamim*, presented as thanksgiving for ‘perfection’, or ‘health’, or ‘soundness’, takes the form *shalem*, meaning ‘complete’. Robertson Smith disputed this interpretation and suggested that the form *shalem* was related to a sense meaning ‘to pay’ or to discharge the equity owing on a vow, an interpretation that appears, despite his denials, to reinforce the idea of a negotiation, or bargaining process.<sup>22</sup>

Two offerings related to and included in the category of *shelamim* (peace offerings) were the *tenufa*, the wave offering (literally swinging, shaking or waving), and the *teruma*, the ‘heave’ or ‘elevation’ offering (literally, to remove, or lift).<sup>23</sup> The *asham* or ‘guilt’ and the *chata’at* or ‘sin’ offerings, however, were both obligatory and prescribed for specific conditions.

An ideal example of the shared sacrifice is that described in the installation offering for Aaron and his sons, the priests. In this ceremony, like a *zevach shelamim*, the peace or shared offering, the fat, kidneys and liver of the ram were

offered to God, and the priest (Moses) received the breast, while the worshippers (Aaron and his sons) shared the remainder of the flesh. ‘This is a shared or communion feast of the kind Robertson Smith took to be close in form to the original sacrificial rite,’ Lewis observes, ‘The peace offerings are usually expressions of thanksgiving’.<sup>24</sup> They were made in fulfilment of a vow, or in gratitude for benefits either hoped for or received, and made with a ‘sense of joy’.<sup>25</sup> Shared sacrifices were offered either in celebrating a happy occasion of communal life, such as the declaration of Saul as the first king of Israel, or some important event in connection with a family or individual, such as the pact between Jacob and Laban at Mizpeh.<sup>26</sup>

Another category of sacrifice, however, may embody a sense of loss, of something valuable being relinquished for the sake of something else, for example as in ‘I sacrifice my life for you’, or if, say, young virgins are sacrificed in spring to ensure fruitful harvests later in the year. This is illustrated by the story of the warrior Jephthah’s vow:

And Jephthah made the following vow to the Lord: ‘If you deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the Lord’s and shall be offered by me as a burnt offering.’ Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites and attacked them, and the Lord delivered them into his hands. He utterly routed them . . . so the Ammonites submitted to the Israelites. When Jephthah arrived at his home in Mizpah, there was his daughter coming out to meet him, with timbrel and dance! She was an only child; he had no other son or daughter. On seeing her, he rent his clothes and said ‘Alas, daughter! You have brought me low; you have become my troubler for I have uttered a vow to the Lord and I cannot retract.’

(Judges 11: 30ff.)

Here, what should have been an offering of thanksgiving was transformed into a tragic sacrifice.

In some sense then, although gift-giving lay at the heart of every kind of ceremony of offering, the intentions behind the various acts embodied subtle differences. The *qorban* as an offering was propitiatory, a ‘drawing near’ to God. When a state of ‘guilt’ or ‘sin’ necessitated the ritual, ‘exchange’ may be inferred, but if the type of offering was such as that of Jephthah’s vow, then ‘loss’ became a feature. In large measure, though, the ritual offerings were, as Robertson Smith has written, a repast of communion, with offerings of thanksgiving.

### **Guilt and sin – the ritually impure and the trespasser**

The animals used in guilt offerings and sin offerings were slaughtered in the Sanctuary, the blood was used in different ways, and the flesh then burnt ‘in a

clean place'.<sup>27</sup> The blood of the sin offering was sprinkled in the direction of the base of the altar or applied to its horns, and was a rite of expiation. The guilt offering, however, did not serve the same purpose and the blood was thrown against the sides of the altar. The distinction made between notions of guilt and sin and the use of blood in the accompanying rituals reflect the distinction between the states requiring those rituals. In fact it is necessary to distinguish 'sin' (*chata'at*), 'guilt' or 'trespass' (*asham*), 'blood-guilt' (*damim*) and 'perversion' or 'iniquity' (*avon*). The circumstances where a state of 'guilt' (not 'sin') was incurred, could be defined as follows: 'And if anyone sin (*te-cheta*), and do any of the things which the Lord hath commanded not to be done, though he know it not, yet he is guilty (*asham*), and shall bear his iniquity (*avon*)'.<sup>28</sup> Offerings were to be made for 'sin' and 'guilt' or 'trespass' in order to re-establish a 'correct' state of being. Blood-guilt, a more severe category, could not be assuaged by offering an animal sacrifice.

### *The Guilt offering – asham*

The 'guilt' offering served to expiate two types of offence: one was the *asham* to be offered when there was doubt as to the commission of a sinful act, the other *asham* was to be offered for the definite commission of four specific offences, which will be discussed below. The first 'concept' of guilt is described in Leviticus 4: 2, and deals with categories of persons who may 'unwittingly' have incurred a state of guilt 'in regard to any of the Lord's commandments about things *not to be done*', and having done one of them, subsequently realized his/their guilt. The guilt-offering, *asham*, involved the sacrifice of an animal upon whose head the offerer laid his hands, symbolically transferring his guilt to the animal, and 'this the priest shall turn into smoke on the altar, over the Lord's offering by fire. Thus the priest shall make expiation on his behalf for the sin of which he is guilty and he shall be forgiven'.<sup>29</sup> The second type of guilt offering was a 'forfeit' or 'penalty':

- 1 for illegal appropriation of private property, the offering being made only after pecuniary reparation;<sup>30</sup>
- 2 for misappropriation of sacred property;<sup>31</sup>
- 3 in the offering of a *nazir* when interrupting the days of avowed naziritism by levitical impurity;<sup>32</sup>
- 4 for sexual intercourse with a slave betrothed to another man.<sup>33</sup>

It is difficult to see why these conditions all required 'guilt offerings'. Perhaps the laying of the hands upon the sacrificial animal indicates a condition requiring transference, perhaps simply from a ritually impure state, *tameh*, to the ritually pure state of *tahor*. The leper, for instance, required both the *asham* and the *chata'at* to attain ritual purity in order to participate in sacrificial rites at the Temple, when and if necessary, and therefore the purifying offering was

required. Other instances where the *asham* was required suggest punishment for contravention of the commandment 'you shall not steal'. Stealing could be an offence against man as well as God himself, for, in the case of stealing sacred property, this was an offence against the sacred, the *qadosh*. The *nazir*'s vow was a serious matter, involving the concept of the *qadosh* again. In the instance of the slave, the invasion of her body, with a subsequent devaluation of her status for her betrothed, may be a factor, but the idea of a 'forbidden mixture' may also be relevant here.<sup>34</sup> But the overriding common factor may have been concern about an offence committed against God's own category, the *qadosh*.

### *The purifying-offering – chata'at, or sin offering*

The person requiring the rituals of the 'purifying offering' or 'sin offering' would, in the presence of the priest, lay his hand upon the head of an unblemished beast which he himself would then slaughter.<sup>35</sup> After the ritual slaughter, the priest would dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the Lord, in front of the veil of the sanctuary. Some of the blood would be smeared on the horns of the altar of sweet incense while the remaining blood was poured on to the base of the altar where burnt offerings took place. What occurred after this was unusual. The flesh of the *chata'at* was not burnt on the altar 'lest the offerer imagine he was purchasing forgiveness from God by offering up the animal. It was removed outside the camp. The carcass had been used in the Sanctuary, and had to be treated reverently'.<sup>36</sup>

The purifying offering would take place in differing conditions and on various occasions. For example, on the Day of Atonement the High Priest performed the purifying offerings for the whole congregation in the presence of the whole community. Two goats were used, one as a scape goat which was sent to 'a precipitous place', *azazel*, while the other was slaughtered and its blood used in the cleansing ritual.<sup>37</sup> The sin committed 'unwittingly' by an individual, or by the whole congregation, would be purged by the same sort of offering. This type of sin was an accidental act.

If any one shall sin (*chata'at*) through error, in any of the things which the Lord hath commanded not to be done, and shall do any one of them . . . and the priest shall make atonement for him as touching his sin that he hath sinned, and he shall be forgiven.

(Leviticus 4: 1, 35)

Yet in the following situations, offerings of purification, *chata'at*, were also required: women were required to be cleansed after menstruating as well as after childbirth, as was a man who had suffered a genital discharge.<sup>38</sup> The *metzora*, the leper or person with scaly skin lesions, was required to appear before the priest twice; once outside the camp and then just before reincorporation into the camp.<sup>39</sup>

There were other instances in which *chata'at* was required. If a person saw or knew something as a witness but refrained from speaking even though asked to do so, then he would have to bear his 'iniquity', *avon*. If ritual impurity was contracted by touching an unclean object, or the corpse of an unclean animal, or a person who was ritually polluted, the sin or purification offering was required. In addition, if an oath had been sworn and not honoured, then 'he shall bring as his penalty to the Lord, for the sin of which he is guilty, a female from the flock, sheep or goat, as a sin offering; and the priest shall make expiation on his behalf for his sin'.<sup>40</sup>

The texts liken the *tzara'at* (skin lesions) affecting a person to the *tzara'at* of a building or within a fabric, and it may be possible to define them all as entities possessing physical blemishes or imperfections. Just as patchy, discoloured or erupted flesh is imperfect, so the stones or yarn that develop defects are described as 'streaky green or red'.<sup>41</sup> The misfortune of a temporary physical imperfection and the taint of pollution are time-bound afflictions that are dealt with according to a ritual formula in all three cases of *tzara'at*, affecting skin, fabric and stone. Menstruating, or giving birth, or suffering a discharge from the penis, cannot be construed as 'failures' or 'mistakes'; the appearance of mould-like efflorescence in stone and fabric is not something that occurs by design, although it may be perceived as an 'error' or mishap. So why are these situations dealt with by the 'sin offering'? With reference to the person who has come into contact with a corpse we read:

But the man that shall be unclean [*yit'ma*, from the root *tameh*] and shall not purify himself [*yit'chata*, from the root *chata'at*], that soul shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly because he hath defiled [*timé*] the sanctuary of the Lord; the water of sprinkling hath not been dashed against him – he is unclean [*tameh*].

(Numbers 19: 20)

'Sin' and 'pure' are enmeshed in the same word. The verb used for the word 'to purify', *le-chaté*, is a form of the noun *chata'at*, and it implies 'impurity is removed'. But while the physically blemished state of *chata'at* smacks of ritual impurity and 'inadvertent sin', the word itself also paradoxically contains the meaning of being able to purify. Using the same root letters that appear in the noun gives the form of the verb *yit'chata*, which signifies the purifying ritual.

Again, in connection with a building affected by the plague of leprosy: 'he [that is, the priest] shall take to cleanse [*le-chaté*] the house . . .' and: 'And he shall cleanse [*ve-chité*] the house with the blood of the bird, and with the running water and with the living bird, and with the cedar wood, and with the hyssop, and with the scarlet'.<sup>42</sup>

It would appear that the symbolic significance of bodily emissions and eruptions of plague (*nega tzara'at*) in cloth, stone and skin hold a key to the area described as 'sin'. The root from which *chata'at* is derived can mean 'sin, failure, mistake, inadvertence; to miss the mark'.<sup>43</sup> The cleansing ceremony in

which a 'sin offering' was sacrificed eliminated some kind of 'mistake' and perhaps 'offering of purification' is a better translation than 'sin offering', where the blood spilt in that offering was a purifying, piacular substance of great symbolic value. This explanation of the *chata'at* has been offered: 'Its real meaning is something that will purge, purify, and wash away the sin'.<sup>44</sup> Yet it is only later that the notion of the active, intentional sin crept into the sense of the word. In the texts discussing the priestly mediation in cases of buildings, fabrics and human flesh afflicted with *tzara'at*, the 'leprosy' generally appears to be a random occurrence and the blight is outside the control of the sufferer, and certainly outside the control of inanimate cloth or stone.

The association of sin with the physical condition of leprosy is dramatized in God's punishment of Miriam, Moses' sister. Miriam and Aaron 'spoke against' Moses because he had married a Cushite woman. They also said: 'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?' God then appeared to Moses, Aaron and Miriam in the Tent of Meeting as a pillar of cloud, and announced that Moses was not a 'mere prophet' to whom a vision of God could appear in a dream. God regarded Moses as 'trusted in all My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of the Lord'. The cloud in which God had manifested himself then disappeared from the Tent of Meeting and

there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales! When Aaron turned toward Miriam, he saw that she was stricken with scales (*metzora'at*). And Aaron said to Moses, 'O my lord, account not to us the sin which we committed in our folly. *Let her not be as one dead, who emerges from his mother's womb with half his flesh eaten away.*' So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, 'O God, pray heal her!' But the Lord said to Moses, 'If her father spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted.' So Miriam was shut out of camp seven days; and the people did not march on until Miriam was readmitted.

(Numbers 12)

This was a special case of *tzara'at*, one in which God was clearly seen to smite in anger and heal in a merciful answer to prayer. 'O God, pray *heal* her,' Moses prayed. He did not use the word *chaté*, purify; he used the root from which 'physician', *rofé*, stems: *refá*. So Miriam was not purified, she was healed by God himself. The punishment was combined with a ritual period of banishment. Since the cure came directly from God himself, there was no priestly mediation and no sacrificial rite. But the story, written by the post-exilic Priests, was powerful enough to have taken over all the syntagma associated with *tzara'at* and focused and subsumed every case under the umbrella of a 'sin' that could be punished, or for which forgiveness from God was sought.<sup>45</sup> Through prayer, it was demonstrated, a cure could be wrought.

### Blood as purifier in Sacrifice

The symbolic value of blood, whether animal or human, was crucial to the meaning behind the sacrificial offering. The blood that flowed from a sacrificed beast was the expiatory substance through which the priest as mediator facilitated atonement for states of *chata'at* and *asham*. The *qorban*, as offering, allowed a particular person in a particular state to draw near to the god and negotiate a re-entry into society. The smearing and sprinkling of animal blood in different places wrought powerful transformations through its mediatory significance. The wanton shedding of human blood held similarly potent connotations but then negotiation through sacrifice was no longer possible. Bloodshed required its recompense and in order to avenge the victim, the blood of the perpetrator of the crime had to be shed.

I have shown how blood was used by the priest in making expiation during the ceremony of ritual sacrifice. However, if a man slaughtered an animal outside the camp, and it was not presented at the Tabernacle as an offering, 'blood-guilt' (*damim*) was attached to that man.<sup>46</sup> Lewis writes that: 'Ordinary slaughter has to be distinguished from sacrifice. All sacrifice must be brought to the central place of worship'.<sup>47</sup> One of Jastrow's definitions of 'blood' states that in ritual slaughter 'the blood with which life escapes when cutting the animal's throat is called a *fluid* (with regard to levitical purity)'; it is *kasher*, that is, it does not possess the same nature as blood that flows from an animal when it has been slaughtered in another way, or has been killed by a beast of prey, thus rendering it *terefah*, that is, torn and unfit for human consumption.<sup>48</sup>

Any person, whether citizen or stranger, who eats what has died or has been torn by beasts shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he shall be clean. But if he does not wash [his clothes] and bathe his body, he shall bear his guilt.

(Leviticus 17: 15)

The human body was polluted by ingesting meat that had not been slaughtered according to ritual, a prohibition primarily against eating the blood of the animal. The human body itself was specifically not to be slaughtered wilfully, because it was made in God's image. Concerning this, and the prohibition against murder, God says:

Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; . . . You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it. But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning: I will require it of every beast; of man, too, will I require a reckoning for human life, of every man for that of his fellow man! Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; For in His image did God make man.

(Genesis 9: 3–6)



Durkheim noted that the sanctity of human blood explains why it must be spilt for efficacy in rituals:

There are organs and tissues that are specially marked out: these are particularly the blood and the hair . . . human blood is so holy a thing that in the tribes of Central Australia, it frequently serves to consecrate the most respected instruments of the cult . . . in certain cases, the *nurtunja* is regularly anointed from top to bottom with the blood of a man . . . streams of blood are poured upon the rocks which represent the totemic animals and plants. There is no religious ceremony where blood does not have some part to play.

(Durkheim 1971: 137)

Durkheim was clearly influenced by the ideas surrounding the power of animal blood as a sacramental agent in Ancient Judaism; however, although in Judaism human blood was also perceived as sacred, it was not to be spilt. Instead, animal blood was the substance that sanctified and purified in rituals of sacrificial offerings.

Blood was the central, polysemic substance in Ancient Judaism, because it was primarily associated with life itself: 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives upon the altar – it is the blood, as life, that effects expiation'.<sup>49</sup>

Animal blood was smeared or dashed over the altar and was daubed on the earlobe, thumb and toe during the anointing of a priest.<sup>50</sup> The priest himself used blood in the same way during the cleansing ceremony of the leper – *metzora* – on whom blood was also sprinkled.<sup>51</sup> The use of blood and oil signified the return of the leper to an unblemished state.

### Human blood and hair

When human blood was shed in wilful murder, the land became polluted: 'You shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and the land can have no expiation for blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it'.<sup>52</sup> Jastrow cites the Talmudic notion: 'what right hast thou to assume that thy blood is redder than thy neighbor's', that is, you have no right to commit murder even under compulsion. Therefore there was to be no wilful murder, no eating of blood, and no ritual sacrifice of an animal unless its life-blood was to be dashed upon the altar in the Tabernacle or Temple.

In one ceremony only could human blood be shed by cutting the flesh, and this was during the circumcision of eight-day-old males, the central covenant, *brit mila*, between God and the people of Israel.<sup>53</sup> No random cutting of the flesh was permitted; marking of the body with incisions during mourning was forbidden, as was tattooing. In addition, daily shaving of the places on the body of a man where vital veins flow, the temples and neck, was prohibited:



You shall not eat anything with its blood.  
 You shall not practice divination or soothsaying.  
 You shall not round off the side-growth on your head, or destroy the side growth of your beard.  
 You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am the Lord.<sup>54</sup>

(Leviticus 19: 26–8)

The juxtaposition of ideas in these three verses is significant. The injunction not to eat blood reappears; a warning against dabbling in the supernatural, God's domain, comes next; and the preservation of human 'wholeness' of body then follows. It is tempting to imagine ritual ceremonies performed by indigenous Canaanite tribes that entailed the slaughter of beasts and the eating of flesh mixed with blood; blood then being utilized in divination spells, and possible trance-sessions where the physical safety of the body was at risk via tattooing, piercing, cutting or blood-letting of a non-permitted nature. Kottek cites Josephus: 'During their contest with the prophet Elijah, the prophets of Ba'al "cut themselves with knives and barbed lances after the custom of their country"'.<sup>55</sup>

A similar juxtaposition can be found in the tale of Saul, the Philistines and the Witch of Endor. The story tells of an occurrence that is purported to have taken place before Leviticus became a written text. During the time of Saul (around 1000 BCE) there was a battle between the Israelites and the Philistines:

They struck down the Philistines . . . and the troops were famished. (They) pounced on the spoil; they took the sheep and cows and calves and slaughtered them on the ground, and the troops ate with the blood. . . . And Saul ordered . . . 'You must not sin against the Lord and eat with the blood.' . . . Thus Saul set up an altar to the Lord.

(I Samuel 14: 31–2)

But later, Saul himself, faced with the might of the Philistines, and anxious for success in battle, 'said to his courtiers, "Find me a woman who consults ghosts, so that I can go to her and inquire through her." And his courtiers told him that there was a woman in En-dor who consulted ghosts'.<sup>56</sup>

So here was a traditional tale describing prohibited actions: blood had been eaten together with the flesh of animals killed improperly, and a necromantic divination ceremony had taken place.

### **The body of the *metzora* and the body of the *nazir***

These two particular bodies represent opposing categories; the *metzora*, the leper, was ritually polluted, while the *nazir*, one who had taken the vow of the Nazirite, was pure and *qadosh*. Both states of being required a separation from the normal condition of ordinary people. The *metzora* was physically removed

from the rest of society, and was kept distanced and apart from the group. The *nazir* remained separated from others in society because of self-imposed physical limitations and restrictions. When the period of naziritism came to an end, the purifying ceremony took place. Despite the ban on shaving of certain facial hair, the priests were shaved of all body hair before their ceremonial installation and the *metzora* was likewise shaved before his reincorporation into the camp after the purifying ritual.<sup>57</sup> At the end of the period of his or her vow, the *nazir* cut his or her hair, which was then ceremonially burned as a sacrificial offering.<sup>58</sup> These ceremonies were carefully monitored by priests as part of the cleansing rituals. Because the *nazir*, as a person, was *qadosh*, the long hair of the nazirite was described as the hair of his or her ‘consecrated’ head. Likewise, when the *metzora* was declared *tahor*, ritually pure, by the priest, a purifying ceremony took place. The purpose of, and necessity for, the *asham*, or trespass offering, provides an interesting and curious aspect of liminality in both cases.

The *nazir* was a man or woman who made a vow that was a time-bound ‘contract’, constituting the following during the period of the vow:

- 1 hair remained unshorn;
- 2 abstinence from strong drink;
- 3 avoidance of contact with a human corpse.

The vow was taken ‘purely for personal reasons, such as thanksgiving for recovery from illness, or for the birth of a child. . . . The institution disappeared in its entirety with the destruction of the Temple’.<sup>59</sup>

At the end of the self-imposed period, which was usually a minimum of thirty days, the purging ritual of the nazirite was performed.<sup>60</sup> If, before the end of the thirty days, the *nazir* had interrupted the days of avowed naziritism by levitical impurity, where inadvertently the *nazir* had been polluted by touching a corpse, then the *asham* ritual was performed.<sup>61</sup> Following the *asham*, the *nazir* would then begin the period of the vow anew. This ‘transitional’, liminal, guilt offering, required before the final purifying offering could be made, was also required by the *metzora*. The ‘guilt offering’ took place *during* the cleansing ceremony of the *metzora*, that is, before the later ‘sin offering’.<sup>62</sup> The rabbinic explanation for this is that the *asham* did not bring complete expiation, as did the *chata’at*. The guilt offering ‘was brought either as penalty for a “trespass” (see Leviticus 5: 14–16, 20–6), when it had to be offered besides the restitution; or in doubtful cases (see Leviticus 5: 17–19), where its purpose was to suspend the effects of sin’.<sup>63</sup>

Lewis has observed that the guilt offering for a leper was a distinctive ceremony, seemingly designed particularly for the cleansing of his condition, in that it contained a striking point of similarity to something done for the installation of Aaron and his sons as priests. Blood of the guilt offering was placed upon the leper’s right ear, the thumb of the right hand and the ‘great toe’ of his right foot.<sup>64</sup>

The blood of any sacrifice brought to the altar was given expiatory significance. . . . The association of blood with life, and touching it on the leper to re-cover him symbolically with life . . . after his recovery from the death-tainted uncleanness of leprosy, is a possible significance for this use of blood . . . The sense in which the leper has committed sin or incurred guilt, except by his intrinsic uncleanness, is not made any plainer by the list of things for which other guilt-offerings are required.

(Lewis 1987: 604–6)

Lewis is clearly and understandably perplexed; but the case of the *nazir* provides a clue, because here the guilt offering is, indeed, a ‘transitional’ offering during the period of the vow, when the vow had been broken unintentionally.

Lewis has offered a general analysis of sacrifice, guilt and sin, postulating that the prosperity celebrated with joy in worship and sacrifice was replaced by a ‘sense of guilt, offence against God, and the need to pacify his just anger’. With the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah came the exile, and atonement became a dominating factor in sacrifice.

An ethical framework develops in which the individual person’s offences and his sin are ever before him. With the kingship fallen, the priests gain the leadership of the people in exile and after exile. The systematic shaping of the sacrificial cult was the work of priests in the time of their authority and in accord with their views of guilt and sin. Most of Leviticus was codified and written down in these post-exilic times. . . . In bold outline then, these were Robertson Smith’s views on the changes which affected sacrifice among the Semites.

(Lewis 1987: 600)

So over time, the cultural construction of the concepts of sin and guilt changed. This is particularly significant because a close examination of the Hebrew words used will reveal that there is not necessarily a precise inference of ‘sin’ in the word which has been translated as ‘sin offering’. The laws of Ancient Judaism provided more than one way of dealing with social situations, that is, some types of ‘guilt’ and ‘sin’ were not to be assuaged by sacrificial offerings: ‘You shall put the Israelites on guard against their uncleanness, lest they die through their uncleanness by defiling My Tabernacle which is among them’.<sup>65</sup>

The clear meaning is that ritual impurity is of importance only if and when the offerer wished to have access to the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. In addition, anyone in a ritually impure state who did approach and defile the Tabernacle would, somehow, die.

It may thus be concluded that the *chata’at* ceremony required for ritual purification of the body was a purging ritual and did not imply that the person was guilty of iniquity. At a public lecture on ‘Ritual Purity in Judaism’, Maccoby asserted that ‘a person in a state of ritual impurity is not in a state of sin’.<sup>66</sup> He

emphasized that ritual purity was required in only two instances – when a person wished to visit the Temple, or wished to eat Holy Food, the *qodesh qodashim*, which the priests ate. Thus it may be inferred that most people were in a state of ritual impurity most of the time and only resorted to the ceremony of *chata'at* when absolutely required to do so. But intention and motive would be significant features regulating the *asham* ritual, because it related to transgressions not resulting from biological states, but those with social implications.

### **Thanksgiving in Temple and synagogue: sacrifice and prayer**

One of the several rituals of ancient Israelite sacrifice held within it the germ of intent generally related to prayers addressed to the deity. I shall demonstrate how such prayer formulae, giving thanks or requesting benefits, and based on an accepted notion, were not only part of the public religious format, but also came to be used within the sphere of the magical. Mauss argued that because prayer was associated with, and considered to be efficacious in, religious rites, that efficacy was bound up with the invocation to 'religious powers' and argued further that 'By that very fact it is distinguishable from another similar activity with which it has often been confused – incantation'.<sup>67</sup> It is clear, however, *contra* Mauss, that within the scope of this work, because both prayer and incantation are addressed to the deity, or to symbols and names associated with the deity, they must be considered to have equal weight.

The Peace Offering or Offering of Thanksgiving, called *Shelamim*, or *Zevach Todat Shelamav*, was a sacrificial offering made in gratitude for an individual's feelings of inner peace at having attained a sense of perfection or completion. The sacrifice was made 'in fulfilment of a vow, or in gratitude for benefits received or expected'.<sup>68</sup> It was a sort of payment, (*le-shalem*: to pay) and was an offering designated as 'holy in a minor degree of holiness', that is, *qodesh qal* as opposed to the other types of sacrificial offerings, which were *qodesh qodashim*, holy of holies.<sup>69</sup> With the exception of the priests' portions reserved from the offering, *qedoshim qalim* could be eaten by the offerer and his family and guests, at what must have been a private party of celebration. The *Shelamim*, essentially a voluntary offering, was described by Josephus, a Hellenized Jew writing in Greek for an educated Roman readership, as a 'thank offering', one that was occasionally 'appointed for escaping distempers'.<sup>70</sup> The offering of thanksgiving was not associated with purification, or guilt for transgressions, but instead may be interpreted as a private communion with God.

About thirty years after the destruction of the Temple in CE 70, Rabbi Gamaliel initiated the organization of divine worship and he formalized the *Tefillah*, or Prayer, called Eighteen Benedictions, or *Sh'monah-Esrei*. The essence of the prayer's content antedated the destruction of the Temple, and Gamaliel's version was based on the liturgy as performed during Temple times. The three opening benedictions are known as 'Praises', twelve intermediate

blessings are ‘Petitions’, and the three concluding benedictions are ‘Thanksgivings’. The ‘Eighteen Benedictions’ prayer is not the product of one mind or of one period. The ‘Praises’ date from the period of the Great Assembly, *bet knesset ha-gadol*, around the fourth century BCE, the ‘Petitions’ date from the late Second Temple period, while the ‘Thanksgivings’ were from an earlier period, dating from the mid-second century BCE, in the time of the Maccabees. The distinction between *Tefillah* (prayer) and *Tehillah* (praise) is made clear in the wording of the prayer-formulae. In the milieu of early Judaism, both were messages in writing, enunciated vocally instead of through a physically sacrificed creature. The written word validated the message. Those formulae which were not supplicatory were, in the main, psalms, *tehillim*, or words of praise to God, hence the word *halalu-yah* – ‘let us praise God’.

The ‘Eighteen Benedictions’ acknowledge God as the ancient God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and within the blessing format, thank God for such things as dew and rain, and emphasize the particular Pharisaic idea of the immortality of the soul and its resurrection. The prayer begins and ends with invocations of God’s power, and

between the first and last invocations, it was the custom . . . to insert prayers for the forgiveness of sins through understanding and repentance, for the healing of the sick, for the blessing of the year, for national redemption and the gathering of the dispersed, for the constituted authorities, (judges, elders, teachers), for the Holy City.

(Margolis and Marx 1960: 208)

### **Rabbinic ideas on predestination and fate**

I would argue that the Offering of Thanksgiving represents the beginning of an attempt to acknowledge or influence the outcome of the workings of ‘fate’ or ‘fortune’, as directed by God. During Second Temple times, with Hellenistic influence, ‘fate’ or ‘fortune’ were accepted as valid notions by the Pharisaic Rabbis. In addition, the word ‘*mazal*’, sometimes translated as ‘luck’, has the essential meaning of a planet or a constellation of stars, and also indicates the ‘destiny’ of a person.<sup>71</sup> Babylonian astrology influenced Talmudic thought to the extent that the Sages wrote a confirmatory phrase defining the influence of heavenly bodies: ‘Not the day’s planet, but the constellation of the hour (of birth) has influence’ [*lo mazal yom gorem, mazal sha’ah . . .*] and asserted that a planet’s influence at the time of birth would be a factor in the wisdom and wealth of a person.<sup>72</sup> Ideas of Fate, or Luck, as embodied in the idol *Gad*, were also influential on Jewish thought; *Gad* was ‘worshipped by the Babylonians and the Jewish exiles’.<sup>73</sup>

During the time of Josephus, and certainly before the destruction of the Temple, ideas about God’s mastery of his universe led to a debate about free will and predestination between the rival sects, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Josephus described the opinions of the Sadducees:

they take away fate, and say there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal; but they suppose that all our actions are in our power, so that we are ourselves the causes of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly.

(Josephus *Antiquities* Book XIII: v)

The Pharisees, however, ‘follow the conduct of reason; and what that prescribes to them as good for them, they do’. Josephus continued:

when they determine that all things are done by fate, they do not take away the freedom from men of acting as they think fit; since their notion is, that it hath pleased God to make a temperament, whereby what He wills is done, but . . . the will of men can act virtuously or viciously.

(Josephus *Antiquities* Book XVIII: i)

Josephus used the word ‘fortune’, *tyche*, when writing of the physicians who, unable to cure the ailing Herod, ‘left the small hopes they had of his recovery in the power of that diet, and committed him to fortune’.<sup>74</sup> He also used the Greek word for ‘fate’, *moera*, embodied in the Three Fates (*moerae*).<sup>75</sup>

### The transition to magical spells

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes, possibly under Hellenistic influence, wrote: ‘I saw that there is nothing better for man than to enjoy his possessions since that is his *portion*. For who can enable him to see what will happen afterward?’<sup>76</sup>

The word used for ‘his portion’ or ‘his lot or destiny’ is *chelkó*, and the same word has been used several times in that sense on an Aramaic magic incantation bowl, in addition to the words ‘his stars’, *mazalya*, and ‘his lot’, *gadya*.<sup>77</sup> This notion of Destiny, *gada*, is found in other incantation bowls.<sup>78</sup> Lesses, citing Goodenough, has also highlighted an interesting connection between physical aspects of the heavenly zodiac and the mystical aspects of God’s celestial chariot. The image has undoubted associations with ideas concerning Fate and the order of the universe:

The synagogue mosaics that depict the wheel of the zodiac in a circle around Helios and his quadriga are a visible image of God in his chariot: ‘*The zodiac in the synagogues, with Helios at the center, . . . seems . . . to proclaim that the God worshipped in the synagogue was the God who had made the stars, and revealed himself through them in cosmic law and order and right, but who was himself the Charioteer guiding the universe and all its order and law*’.<sup>79</sup>

(Lesses 1998: 363)

In the Book of 'Secrets', or 'Mysteries', *Sefer ha-Razim*, a Greek prayer to Helios, embodying attributes of God, is transcribed into Hebrew: 'Holy eastern Helios, good sailor, highest governor, most exalted, who of old regulates the heavenly wheel, holy umpire, controller of the poles, Lord, glorious guide, master, soldier'.<sup>80</sup>

Again, this illustrates a *Weltanschauung* wherein the world and universe move under the influence of Helios, the sun, that guides and directs, as God does, the destiny of his creation and creatures.

Sacrifice, prayer and magic may be perceived as symbolic acts set against the workings of 'fate'. The sacrificed creature was a token, or message to the divinity. In the case of the Guilt Offering, the message may have been (a): I did something wrong, I disobeyed your instructions; please forgive me. Or, in the case of the Purification Ritual, (b): I am in a state of ritual impurity, it is part of the process of human existence, it has rendered me 'unclean' and I wish to purify myself by means of the lives of these birds; please accept them. Finally, as I have argued in the case of the Peace Offering, the message might be (c): I am grateful for the apparent 'perfection' of a particular aspect of my life. I hope that matters continue in this vein; here is an offering which I hope you will accept as a token of my thanks.

Apart from the psalm or 'song of praise' as a communal message, or the private prayer structure of the *tefilla*, the way to deal with personal aspiration or misfortune was to resort to another kind of message in writing, namely the spell or magic words written on a scroll, a bowl, or an amulet of parchment or metal. Durkheim argued that

Between the magician and the individuals who consult him . . . there are no lasting bonds which make them members of the same moral community. The magician has a clientele . . . and it is very possible that his clients have no other relations between each other, or even do not know each other; even the relations which they have with him are generally accidental and transient; they are just like those of a sick man with his physician.

(Durkheim 1971: 44)

He was drawing here on Robertson Smith, who went further in clarifying the matter, distinguishing between the public and the private:

It was a national not a personal providence that was taught by ancient religion. So much was this the case that in purely personal concerns the ancients were very apt to turn not to the recognised religion of the family or of the state, but to magical superstitions. . . . There was therefore a whole region of possible needs and desires for which religion could and would do nothing; and if supernatural help was sought in such things it had to be sought through magical ceremonies, designed to purchase or constrain the favour of demoniac powers with which the public religion had nothing to do.

(Robertson Smith 1972: 264)



A magic spell as contained in the writing of an amulet or the commission of an incantation bowl was also a message, via certain angels, to the divinity. It was saying (a): 'I wish my daughter to enjoy a healthy, successful pregnancy. Keep the demons away from her. Receive my message'. Or (b): 'My relative (child so-and-so of mother so-and-so) is sick. Effect a cure with this message to the divinity via an angel'. Or (c): A general message, via an angel, to the divinity about maintaining a *status quo*: 'Keep my home secure; keep the demons out'.

A representation of a spirit or demon, or even a foetus, might appear on the metal or other material of an amulet, or the clay of an incantation bowl, but it would not be worshipped, and was not perceived as idolatrous probably because it was not an exact representation of anything that was 'a likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth'.<sup>81</sup> The spell was efficacious because it utilized the power of God, his name, and the names of his angels. The sacrificial service of the *Shelamim* was transformed from the 'free-will' ceremonial under stringent conditions, via the written prayers of Temple and Synagogue, to a loosely constructed private ceremonial rite, which conformed nonetheless to certain conditions within the restricted, yet pseudo-strict format of the spell-writer's craft.

The representation of the sacrificial cult in the scriptures therefore moves on and develops from the earliest references in Genesis, in which Cain, the tiller of the soil, and Abel, the keeper of sheep, decided to offer of their produce to God. The tradition of making sacrificial offerings is then described as becoming established practice, while the reasons for making offerings increased both in number and in complexity. The purely personal offering, which was not a mandatory requirement, appears to have been the preferred type, particularly in its persistence as a thanksgiving offering in the sacrifice known as the *shelamim*. The *shelamim* has been variously interpreted, from the root *sh-l-m*, as *peace* offering, offering in *payment* for blessings received or offering in gratitude for *perfection* or *health*. The other offerings, associated as they were with the Temple cult in matters of ritual impurity or encroachment upon the realm of the *qadosh*, did not hold the same significance as this free-will offering, and it became impossible to make such offerings when the Temple had been destroyed.

It seems as though the *shelamim*, being imbued with the significance of a gesture of personal freedom, was to be the appropriate vehicle for private prayer, and going even further, became the vehicle for private manipulations of the sacred words of prayer used in incantations or amulets. The pervasive use of references in the formal liturgy to the sacrificial ceremonies themselves filtered through to the incantations and magical formulae, and these included cryptic references to scriptural personalities and incidents as well as abstruse and esoteric hints at the mysteries of God's hidden world, peopled as it was with angels that could do battle with the demonic powers that threatened peaceful, ordered existence.





## Part III



*Figure 5* Ossuary with lid. Second Temple period, Israel, c. CE 1–100 (courtesy of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem.) (photo credit: Zev Radovan).

## ORDERING THE BODY IN A WORLD OF DISORDER

Elaborating on the scriptural laws relating to the body, the Talmud displays a rich and voluminous heritage that covers topics such as illness and disability, aspects of diet, sex, pregnancy and childbirth, male circumcision and the attainment of adulthood. A limited yet specific range of issues is treated in order to emphasize rabbinic opinions on 'how things are done'. Sickness and disease are often attributed to a failure in adhering to proper social and cultural norms, and in the post-scriptural divinely ordered world, the way in which the body functions and is considered, is amplified and provides continuity with the earlier tradition.

### **The prescribed boundaries and margins**

The Sages provide elaborate details in respect of time and place regarding almost every aspect of daily living. Central to these rules are prohibitions concerning forbidden foods, the mixing and interbreeding of crops and livestock, or weaving and wearing garments of mixed flax and wool. Categories incorporating ideas such as the 'prohibited', 'anomalous' or 'ambiguous' generate a powerful symbolic message. Steiner argued that the concept of danger inherent in ideas of taboo and prohibitions relating to ritual pollution acted as a device for separating and classifying symbolic zones within society, reflecting the schemata on which the symbolic system itself was based:

Taboo is concerned (i) with all the social mechanisms of obedience which have ritual significance; (ii) with specific and restrictive behaviour in dangerous situations . . . taboo deals with the sociology of danger itself, for it is also concerned (iii) with the protection of individuals who are in danger, and (iv) with the protection of society from those endangered – and therefore dangerous – persons.

(Steiner 1967: 20–1)

Douglas has shown that the danger often lies in a perception of anomaly, in the notion that something is out of place or does not fit within a classificatory pattern:

the camp was to be preserved from defilement like the Temple . . . all bodily discharges disqualified a man from entering the camp as they would disqualify a worshipper from approaching the altar. In short the idea of holiness was given an external, physical expression in the wholeness of the body seen as a perfect container. . . . Holiness means keeping distinct the categories of creation. It therefore involves correct definition, discrimination and order. Under this head all the rules of sexual morality exemplify the holy.

(Douglas 1989: 51–3)

Following Steiner, she writes that ‘danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others’.<sup>1</sup>

These ideas relate to notions of body-management in scriptural and Talmudic texts where protection from perceived danger is often a central theme, together with a proper, precisely regulated relationship between people and God.

### **The body as sacred symbol and gift of God**

The positive and negative commandments of Torah serve as a direct link to God’s will, and strictures on bodily conduct provide a constant connection between man and God. The body should be a reflection of God’s laws regarding ritual purity and an ordered existence, thereby influencing social demeanour as prescribed in Torah. The body of the most elevated Sage was itself adjudged to be as holy as a scroll of the Torah and ‘in the figure of the sage, the Torah became incarnate; knowledge and miracles then coalesced’.<sup>2</sup>

The claim that a sage himself was equivalent to a scroll of the Torah – a material, legal comparison, not merely a symbolic metaphor – is expressed in the following legal thus pragmatic rules deriving from the Yerushalmi (Talmud of the Land of Israel):

He who sees a disciple of a sage who has died is as if he sees a scroll of the Torah that has been burned.

(Y. Moed Qatan 3: 7.X)

R Jacob bar Abayye in the name of R Aha: ‘An elder who forgot his learning because of some accident which happened to him – they treat him with the sanctity owed to an ark [of the Torah]’.

(Y. Moed Qatan 3: 1.XI)

(Neusner 1989: 69)

But if the body of the Sage is itself a Torah, then every other body, too, could and should be adapted to God’s law. Male and female bodies are ordered in rela-

tion to and with reference to Torah and God's commandments to humankind. Torah contains 613 commandments both positive and negative, and these are God's specific requisites for proper living in his world. The number 613 (represented as *TaR'YaG* in the Hebrew numeric system) is thereafter embodied mystically by relating that number to material aspects of human physiology. The 248 positive commandments correspond to the number of bones in the human frame, while the sum of the remaining commandments is similarly assigned to the living body, where the number of sinews, given as 365, in turn corresponds to the number of days in the solar year, bringing the total to 613.<sup>3</sup> Thus the body itself, the earthly space in which it functions in order to fulfil God's commandments, and the heavenly determinants of time, are linked in a mnemonic of the biological, the natural and the supernatural.

### **The Sabbath and the body**

The Temple itself, as the nexus of the interaction between God and humanity, is embodied in human endeavour if only in the negative mode: thirty-nine specific activities are prohibited on the Sabbath, and these activities refer to matters of sacred service connected with the desert Sanctuary and the Jerusalem Temple. Whereas Torah lays down a general law that no work is to be done on the Sabbath, Talmudic tractates are devoted to the study of what does or does not constitute a desecration of the Sabbath. The Talmudic laws of Sabbath deal specifically with categories of physical activity and creative acts. The prohibited actions are:

Sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking; shearing the wool, bleaching, carding, dyeing, spinning, warping, making two thrums, weaving two threads, separating two threads (in the warp), knotting, unknotting, sewing two stitches, tearing for the purpose of sewing two stitches; hunting the stag, slaughtering it, flaying, salting (the flesh), preparing the hide, scraping (the hair), cutting it into pieces; writing two letters of the alphabet, erasing for the purpose of writing two letters; building, demolishing, kindling a fire, extinguishing it; striking with a hammer; transferring an object from one domain to another.

(Shabbat 7: 2)

The metaphysical connections between the holiness of the Temple and the special Sabbath respite granted to humanity because God himself rested on the Sabbath are highlighted by the fact that on the Sabbath and Festivals, bodies refrain from working at precisely those activities connected with Temple service. Instructions for the building of the Tabernacle include details of wood-work, metal-work in brass, silver and gold, the manufacture of coverings from animal skins and woven goats' hair, the manufacture of the priestly garments, and curtains of 'fine twisted linen'.<sup>4</sup> Steinsaltz explains the logic of the scheme:

First it was necessary to analyze the categories of basic activities carried out during the construction of the Tabernacle, and this analysis was summed up in a list of ‘thirty-nine basic labours’, or acts of creation, that were undoubtedly carried out at that time and constitute *avodah*, that is, prototypes of the work forbidden and permitted on the Sabbath. . . . The unique character of talmudic literature is discernible in the ways in which various subjects are related to one another. Milking cows, for example, comes under the category of ‘threshing’. The classification appears meaningless at first glance, but the association becomes clear when the internal logical structure is analyzed: threshing is an action aimed at extracting the edible content from an object that is not itself earmarked at the time for consumption; milking fulfills the same function, although in a different sphere.

(Steinsaltz 1976: 109)

Put more simply, the showbread required for display on the Sanctuary table is represented by the first eleven activities listed above.

In another debate centred on the subject of the Sabbath, the Sages considered the problem of digging within the ruins of a collapsed building in order to rescue the living. They generally accepted that when death occurred, the heart could beat on, albeit for a short time, in the absence of the breath of life.<sup>5</sup> They said:

If a building collapses on a person [on the Sabbath] . . . they [may] dig to remove the rubble from him, *piku'ach*, [to try to save his life] . . . but if he is dead, they leave him there [until after the Sabbath]. How far does one check [to determine whether or not he is dead]? Until his nostrils; and some say, Until his heart.

(Yoma 85a)

In this case, the priority of Sabbath observance takes precedence over the respect usually given to the dead. This legalistic argument about conditions concerning the preservation of human life is the source of an accepted general principle that in almost all circumstances the saving of a human life takes priority over other exigencies. Only three conditions precluded the application of the general principle. Idolatry, incest and bloodshed, ‘which you dare not commit even to save *your* life’, were strictly forbidden.<sup>6</sup>

This general principle, *piku'ach nefesh*, is loosely understood as the duty of saving a soul (*nefesh*), and covers many areas where questions could arise regarding particular actions in particular circumstances. The Sages believed that ‘he who is zealous in desecrating the Sabbath for a seriously ill patient is praiseworthy’.<sup>7</sup> In some circumstances the wearing of an amulet was permissible, even on the Sabbath, when one is not supposed to carry objects from one domain to another. So, on the same principle, as long as it did not involve idolatry, the use of an incantation or amulet was permitted.<sup>8</sup> The Rabbis said:

A person may not walk out on the Sabbath wearing an amulet unless it had been written by an expert.<sup>9</sup> ‘Which is the amulet of an expert? Such as had effected a cure a second and a third time, whether it be an amulet in writing or one consisting of roots. With such he may go out on the Sabbath; obviously so if he had already been attacked by a demon, but also if he had not yet been attacked; obviously so if it is in a circumstance where there is danger, but also if there is no danger. One may tie it and untie it during the Sabbath, provided he does not insert it in a necklace or signet-ring and carry it about because of appearances’ sake.’

(Tosefta Shabbat 4: 9)

The law with regard to written amulets is: ‘Even though they contain the Divine Name, they may not be rescued from fire on the Sabbath, but must be allowed to burn’.<sup>10</sup> The sanctity of human life has priority over the sanctity of the Name of God written upon an amulet, while the sanctity of a Torah scroll, in that it should be rescued from fire on the Sabbath, is, as discussed above, likened to that of a human life.

### **Acts of God, natural causes, human actions, demonic intrusions**

While the Torah lays down rigid rules for bodily practices regarding permitted times, foods, clothing and materials, the Talmud explores, discusses and amplifies those rules. Zohar reveals one of the underlying principles whereby Talmudic treatment of Torah operates:

The openness of the Torah text to significant and even radical reinterpretation was seen by the sages as being due to *inherent ambiguity and multivocality* intentionally implanted in the text by God as an expression of his divine love and concern for Israel.

(Zohar 1987: 103 [emphasis mine])

So the Rabbis appear not to have been unduly perturbed by contradictions in matters of cause and effect, because their own observations could not necessarily underpin the privileging of the consequences of obedience to divine authority over the ever-present and apparent vagaries of fortune. It was generally assumed that people would enjoy God’s blessing if they fulfilled the conditions that brought about the order imposed upon the body by dutifully obeying God’s demands and requirements. The Rabbis, with their characteristic delight in the use of number as a stylistic device, wrote that:

Six organs serve the human being: three are under his control and three are not. The latter are the eye, ear, and nose. He sees what he does not wish to see, hears what he does not wish to hear, and smells what he



does not wish to smell. Under his control are the mouth, hand and foot. If he so desires he reads in the Torah, or uses bad language or blasphemes. As for the hand, if he so desire, it performs good deeds or steals or murders. As for the foot, if he so desire, it walks to theatres and circuses, or to places of worship and study.

(Genesis Rabba LXVII. 3)

The ability to control what the body is doing is emphasized, and self-discipline and moderate behaviour are always recommended. However, the conflict between providence and free will is evident in Talmudic texts.

The Sages taught that ‘Everything is foreseen (by God), yet freedom of choice is given’.<sup>11</sup> They also said that ‘no-one bruises his finger here on earth unless it was so decreed against him in heaven’, and the disciples of Rabbi Chanina believed that ‘neither an illness with which a person is afflicted, nor his death, occurs by chance’.<sup>12</sup> At the time of birth, the alignment of the constellations, *mazal*, influenced a person’s fate, so the order of things was always under threat because of the unknown *mazal*.<sup>13</sup> The unpredictable effects of chance, or fate, in the face of righteous behaviour were articulated by Rabbi Yannai, who said, ‘a man should never stand in a place of danger and say that a miracle will be wrought for him’.<sup>14</sup> So the general rule was that ‘fate’ should never be tempted.

### A regulated regimen

According to the rabbinic view, humanity is encouraged to enjoy the pleasures of life. Abstinence in matters of food and drink was not considered a virtue. The Sages wrote that

one who imposes vows of abstinence upon himself is as though he puts an iron collar around his neck; he is like one who builds a prohibited altar; he is like one who takes a sword and plunges it into his heart. What the Torah forbids is sufficient for you, do not seek to add further restrictions.

(Nedarim 41b)

In daily life, a policy of moderation in all things was advocated by the Sages. Rabbi Yochanan wrote: ‘Do not sit excessively because *tachtonim* (haemorrhoids?) might develop; do not stand excessively because that is harmful to the heart (or stomach, *lev*); do not run excessively because that is harmful to the eyes; rather divide your activities equally’.<sup>15</sup> The reasoning behind the particularities of the advice is not clear, and it probably follows a Babylonian paradigm. In the same way, the Babylonian example regarding phlebotomy became a custom recommended by the Sages, who wrote that ‘no learned person should live in a city where there is no physician, (*rofē*), and no blood-letter’.<sup>16</sup> Preuss remarks that the ancients used bloodletting for two reasons, either as therapy or

as a measure to preserve health. The Talmud teaches that ‘an excess of blood is the main cause of all illnesses’.<sup>17</sup> Mar Samuel said that ‘the correct time for bloodletting is on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, but not on Monday or Tuesday, because that is when the Heavenly Court and the human court are in session, and the general rule is that “the accuser” *satan*, accuses during times of danger’.<sup>18</sup> Supposedly, therefore, while the Sanhedrin and God’s celestial court utilized the angelic forces, these were not available for use against *satan* in a prophylactic incantation.

In advocating a life of moderation in all things, the Sages believed that over-indulgence in food should be avoided. ‘More numerous are those that die at the cooking pot than are victims of starvation’.<sup>19</sup> The Talmud contains extensive advice on food and drink, and the ideal scholar was expected to live in relatively frugal style: ‘This is the life-style for Torah study: Eat bread with salt, drink water by measure, sleep on the ground, and live a life of hardship while you toil in the Torah’.<sup>20</sup>

The Sages recommended warm baths and anointing with oils as essential for well-being and this was done particularly before the Sabbath. Mar Samuel taught that ‘a bath without an oil rub is like the pouring of water on a barrel without penetrating the inside thereof’.<sup>21</sup> The custom of refraining from bathing and anointing during the seven days of mourning is an indication of the physical pleasures associated with bathing.

Physical perfection was admired as much as spiritual perfection. God was said to approve of a physique that was tall, well-built and imposing.<sup>22</sup> Benedictions acknowledging God’s supremacy were provided by the Sages for almost every occasion and the divine origin of physical characteristics was acknowledged, for when ‘a negro, a hunchback, or dwarf’ was seen, the correct response was: ‘Blessed art thou who variest the forms of thy creatures’. Encounters with people showing stigmata of disease or other physical defects, such as an amputee, or the blind, lame or leprous, elicited the blessing ‘Blessed be the true judge’.<sup>23</sup> This phrase, *barukh dayan emet*, is also said upon hearing of a death or other calamitous news, indicating that such eventualities were recognized as part of God’s adjudged plan for his creation, and were as much a part of universal experience as those areas that were controlled and ordered by *halakhah*. Affliction and death were attributed to more than one factor yet the underlying assumption was that the divine rules of correct ritual and the ordered way, *halakhah*, should protect against misfortune.

Deviation from regular habits, *shinui veset*, was thought to cause disease, and it was believed that the body would succumb to illness or ultimately death as a consequence of a person’s own actions. Mar Samuel believed that a change in regimen caused the onset of an agonizingly painful intestinal disease, *choli me’ayim*.<sup>24</sup> Yet he also believed that wind or spirit, (*ru’ach*), often representing a demonic agent, caused all illness. The desert wind, *sharav*, caused fever and brought disruption into people’s lives. Rabbi Ishmael said that ‘ninety nine people die of sunstroke (*sharav*), and one dies by the hand of heaven’. In the

same vein, it was believed that ‘ninety nine people die from the evil eye as against one from natural causes’.<sup>25</sup> Provision was made for dealing with the evil eye: ‘He who fears the evil eye should place his right thumb in his left hand and his left thumb in his right hand – just as in the exorcism of demons – while he recites the magical incantation’.<sup>26</sup>

In the Tanakh and the Talmud, disorder is marked off by states or entities that are anomalous, or ambiguous or ambivalent. These characteristics all herald deviations from the norm in being difficult to type-cast, in having more than one interpretable meaning, or in simultaneously embodying opposing qualities. The deviant entities *par excellence*, were witches and demons, who brought disorder and misfortune into human lives.

### The demons

Drawing on and echoing the tradition of Persian demonology, the *lilin*, *roukhin*, *shedim* and *mazziqin* are some of the most feared of demons in the Talmudic texts. The *mazziqin* were created during the twilight before the first Sabbath.<sup>27</sup>

As God was putting the finishing touches to His great work of creation, He turned his hand to the construction of these beings, who, though included in the plan of things as they were to be, might well be left for last. He had not progressed beyond the fashioning of their souls, however, when the hastening Sabbath overtook Him, and he was obliged to cease His labours to sanctify the first day of rest. So it is that the demons have no bodies, but are constituted wholly of spirit.

(Trachtenberg 1982: 29)

Being created at a time that was neither Sabbath nor week-day, neither night nor day, *ben ha-shmashot*, literally, ‘between the suns’, demons are by nature creatures of liminality, dangerously lingering on the margins of human existence, yet able to manifest in forms that permit them to interact with humans. These demons, marginalized entities, consisting of ethereal souls only, were able to take on physical attributes of birds, animals and presumably humans, in order to bring about disease or sexual disgrace, and were able to attack particular people precisely because they, too, were in marginal states. Capable of destructive and malevolent actions, demons share characteristics of both humans and angels. ‘In three respects they resemble the ministering angels and in three they are like human beings. Like the ministering angels they have wings, they fly from one end of the world to the other, and they know the future. Like human beings, they eat and drink, propagate and die’.<sup>28</sup> Demons could cause sickness and misfortune but were thought to be powerless over objects that had been tied, measured, counted or sealed. According to Talmudic tradition certain actions, such as performing simple activities in ‘pairs’, or drinking an even number of cups, could invite demonic intrusions.<sup>29</sup>

Humans could protect themselves against demons by using seven amulets, six worn on the body and one affixed to the entrance of a dwelling or room: namely, the four fringes of the *tzitzit*, the two cases containing the *tefillin* and the case of scriptural verses set upon the doorpost, the *mezuzah*. Indeed, the Sages believed that ‘neglect of the wearing of the fringe, as well as the omission to fasten the *mezuzah* to the doorpost, caused death among one’s children’.<sup>30</sup> Places where these seven amulets were absent were likely to be the haunt of demons, who lurked near water and in wildernesses, in dark and unclean places such as in the privy, or in ruined buildings, and in cemeteries and isolated palm groves.

The solitary person, one who walks about unaccompanied, or lives and sleeps alone, was threatened with seizure by demons. The emphasis on the inability of the body to withstand the attack of an evil spirit or demon is an indication of the great uncertainty that led to attempts at controlling the uncontrollable. The Rabbis advised using a torch when walking alone, for that was ‘equal to two’, whereas walking by moonlight ‘was equal to three’. The evil spirit could appear before a lone person and inflict injury, whereas if two walked together, the spirit might appear, but could not injure. If three walked abroad together, the evil spirit did not appear at all.<sup>31</sup> Demons were present in many guises, and could injure and harm when least expected. For example, the demon *shibbeta* lurks on the unwashed hand.<sup>32</sup> On waking, the observant Jew offers prayers of thanksgiving and praise. Before God is addressed, however, the hands must be washed.<sup>33</sup> This ritual ablution is called *netilat yadayim*, and is accompanied by a particular blessing. *Netilat yadayim* is also performed before eating, particularly before the consumption of bread and fruit.<sup>34</sup> In order to protect visitors to his home from the demon, Rabbi Huna suspended a jug of water over his front door so that all who entered would wash.<sup>35</sup>

Those who commissioned the writing of a protective incantation bowl or magical amulet feared demons that were part of the varied inheritance from the Persian and Akkadian hierarchy of evil spirits, the *ruchin bishin*. These fears also drew on the tradition of Canaanite and Phoenician evil spirits such as winged sphinxes, horned and tailed demons, and wolf-like creatures, a tradition dating back to the seventh century BCE.<sup>36</sup> In general, no individual demons were credited with particular misfortunes, but the Babylonian hag *Lamashtu*, a ‘composite’ demon, was said to kill unborn children and babies. Babylonian magic was used ‘to insure against, to drive away or to overcome demons; to undo the bad effects of certain “sinful” actions (usually social misdemeanours); . . . to secure the favours of a loved one; to frustrate the activity of hostile sorcerers’.<sup>37</sup>

The Sumerians developed their tradition of dealing with demonic intrusions by combining praxis with a specific terminology in order to ward off the dangers of possession. The Jewish religion, always emphasizing and guarding its monotheistic character, nevertheless absorbed Zoroastrian ideas about earthly and heavenly forces of Good and Truth, and Evil and Deceit.<sup>38</sup>

The early scriptural concept of *Satan* became an elaborate construct known as ‘the accuser’, or *Belial* (literally without the ‘yoke’ of morals or ethics, hence an

entity of no benefit to humanity), and *Mastemah*, ‘the opposer’, or enemy. In the Babylonian Talmud, certain days of the week were considered more propitious than others, and following in that pattern, the actual time when evil walked the earth was specified. The demon *Keteb Meriri* was believed to reign all-powerful from ten in the morning until three in the afternoon between the seventeenth of the month of Tammuz until the ninth day of Av, the day on which the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. The demon was described as having ‘the head of a calf with one revolving horn in the middle, and an eye in the breast, the whole body being covered with scales, hair and eyes’.<sup>39</sup>

In the Talmudic tradition, *Ashmodai* was the king of demons, and ruled with his consort, *Agrat bat Mahalat*. *Agrat* wielded her great power while riding in her chariot, and was believed to be particularly dangerous on Wednesdays and Saturdays.<sup>40</sup> Two Rabbis, Hanina ben Dosa and Abbaye, succeeded in persuading her to desist from her evil activities, yet she continued to lurk in deserted alleyways and retained her malevolent force on the eves of the Sabbath and the fourth day of the week. The demon queen had ten thousand demonic attendants, all of whom were capable of doing harm to humans, and both she and her mother, *Mahalat*, lived in strife with Lilith, Adam’s first unruly and rebellious wife.<sup>41</sup> Lilith was known in Talmudic lore to visit those who sleep alone. She attacked men, and caused nocturnal emissions that generated ritual impurity. The conflict between Lilith and Adam arose when neither would submit to the wishes of the other, so Lilith spoke the ineffable name of God, soared up into the air and since then she is believed to be a threat to the lives of newborn children.<sup>42</sup> Senoi, Sansenoi and Sammangelof were the angels who extracted the promise from Lilith that whenever she saw the names or images or faces of these three angels upon an amulet in a room where there was an infant, she would not touch the child. Male demons, *Lilis*, were believed to interfere in domestic sexual matters, and married couples and their bed-chamber are often specified for protection on incantation bowls.<sup>43</sup>

### On the margins

Death and danger threatened when material substances (or even the immaterial, such as consciousness) were entering or leaving the body: ‘Five types of people are nearer to death than to life; namely, one who eats or drinks, or sleeps, or undergoes phlebotomy, or cohabits in a standing position’.<sup>44</sup> Answering the call of nature could also prove dangerous as demons were thought to lurk in the privy. Talmudic legend has it that the wife of Raba used to rattle a nut in a flask in order to keep such demons away from her husband.<sup>45</sup>

The ordered world of Torah, the taught rules, and *Halakhah*, the correct ‘way’ of the Talmud, are counterpoised by the forces of confusion and disorder made manifest in demonic intrusions or when the body was simply perceived to be at risk in everyday actions. The Talmud gives a further categorization of such marginal states, nominating several conditions where demonic intrusion was

considered a real threat, as in cases of those whose status was at the margins, or on the boundaries, of experience. This classification, where four cases for concern are nominated as potentially at risk, provides a template for a general discussion:

Certain classes of person become particularly susceptible to attack by evil spirits and need *special protection*. . . (and) require guarding (from demons): (i) an invalid, [some say: (ii) a woman in confinement,] (iii) a bridegroom and a bride, [some say: (iv) also a mourner].

(Cohen 1975: 267; Berachot 54b)

Following *Halakhah* might be considered as protection, but the ‘special protection’ mentioned above may refer to prayer formulae which appear on amulets, or being under constant surveillance by other persons.

While the ambiguous status of the leper is recognized in Leviticus because he or she will move between states of ritual impurity and purity, women too, because of the ritual impurity brought about by menstruation or irregular bleeds, will move naturally between the two states of ‘clean’, *tahor*, and ‘unclean’, *tameh*. Like the leper and the menstruant, the individuals classified above are at risk because they embody notions of ambivalence and anomaly, albeit only temporarily. The invalid, *choleh*, stands at the brink of life or death, between health and sickness. The life of the woman in confinement, *chayah*, is under threat, as is the new life she will bring forth. She is one person, but carries another within her, and her peril lies in anomaly, first being two-in-one, then resuming singleton status, while the infant in beginning its own life is also on the threshold of experience. The bride, *kalah*, and groom, *chatan*, stand at the threshold of their changing position in society, traditionally perceived as two persons becoming one flesh, *basar echad*.<sup>46</sup> The mourner, *avel*, by his contact with the pollution of the corpse and the graveyard and by being temporarily associated with death itself, is seen as endangered. In a brief discussion, I shall cover topics such as sickness and health, ideas surrounding sexuality, the generative process, body and soul at conception, and finally, beliefs about body and soul during the dying process, death itself, and mourning and burial customs.

### The invalid

The sick person, *choleh*, was at risk, even if for a limited period, because of his marginalized status, and ‘sickness’ may be perceived as an anomaly and therefore dangerous. It was accepted practice to pray for recovery from illness and to give thanks to God when recovery occurred. The prayers of others were also desirable, and if a person was sick for more than one day, the fact was made public so that prayers could be recited for a recovery.<sup>47</sup> Sacred words of prayer had the power to heal, and Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa attributed the efficacy of a prayer to the fluent and unhesitating manner in which it was pronounced.<sup>48</sup>

Visiting the sick was considered beneficial only in certain circumstances and the patient was customarily visited both by his physician and his friends.<sup>49</sup> However, certain hours of the day (very early and very late) were deemed unsuitable for visiting, and if the patient had a headache, a disorder of the eyes, or a gastric complaint, visiting was not advised because conversation might cause suffering in the first two cases, and in the last instance, the patient could be embarrassed because of diarrhoea.<sup>50</sup>

An unknown Sage of the Mishnaic period voiced the opinion that both the patient and his physician, in colluding against disease, were opposing God's will and that the destiny of the sick should be left to divine decree: 'The best of physicians are destined to go to Gehinnom (the hellish zone)',<sup>51</sup> Rabbi Meir considered sickness to be punishment for a transgression committed by the patient, and the Talmud observes that 'two may become ill with the same sickness yet one recovers and one does not'.<sup>52</sup> The physician's licence to cure has its root in scripture and from this the school of Rabbi Ishmael deduced that specific sanction for healing was given. The Torah text reads:

When men quarrel and one strikes the other with stone or fist, and he does not die but has to take to his bed – if he then gets up and walks outdoors upon his staff, the assailant shall go unpunished, except that *he must pay for his idleness (shivto, or inability to work, or loss of his time) and his cure (rapo yirapeh).*

(Exodus 21: 18–19)

The physician was named a *rofē*, using the same root letters of the phrase *rapo yirapeh*, which, translated literally, means 'he shall surely be cured' or 'thoroughly healed'. The *rofē* was the one who could cure and the assailant was required to pay the medical fees.

The Rabbis were sympathetic towards the patient: 'He who *thinks* he is ill, *is* ill' [Rab Huna; Rab Eleazar ben Ya'akov]. The Rabbis of the Sanhedrin, having some background in medical (or scientific) knowledge, compiled a list of 'symptoms' that served to define the mentally ill. The list mentions the dangers of solitude in the polluting atmosphere of the cemetery and includes the Rabbinic disapproval of wanton destruction as a signifier of disorder. Mental disability is specifically defined by the *way* in which the actions are performed, that is, where rational intention and motive appear to be lacking. In defining mental illness, the Sages said: 'Who is mentally ill? He who goes out at night alone, and he who spends the night in a graveyard, and he who tears his garments and destroys everything that is given to him'.<sup>53</sup>

The Talmud recognizes the inadequacy of these classifications, but underlying the reasons why these circumstances identify the person as 'mentally ill' is the attribution of a certain *manner* in which the actions are performed. The definition is narrowed by the use of the words *derech shūt* – 'if he does them in an *insane manner*, then even *one* is proof of his imbecility'.<sup>54</sup> This close attention to



the way in which actions are performed is a rabbinic marker for correct and ordered practice, *sefer*, and the opposing state of disorder, *irbuvya*, the confusion of categories, or forbidden mixtures. It is interesting, however, to note that the insane manner is not necessarily related to demonic interference. Nevertheless Josephus ascribed King Saul's madness to *hai daimonia*, the effects of demons or evil spirits.<sup>55</sup> The original scriptural text asserts that it was an 'evil spirit from God', *ru'ach elohim ra'ah*, that terrified the king.<sup>56</sup>

### *Demons and sickness*

The power of the word embodied within an amulet or other talismans could be used to combat demons and other agents of disorder that caused illness and misfortune. Talismans such as stones, herbs, roots or the inscriptions on amulets were used during the Talmudic period and their efficacy was attested in tautological fashion: if an amulet had 'worked' on three separate occasions, it was then considered *kemaya mumcha*, a proven amulet. The amulet could not contain material that contradicted Jewish belief, so God was the acknowledged source of the healing power. The use of knotted ropes or threads, garlands of plants and other knotted materials played an important part in folk remedies as well as magical cures. The rabbis believed that 'three knots arrest the illness, five heal it, and seven help even against magic'.<sup>57</sup> This remedy appears in a debate on the provision of healing or curing on the Sabbath, but in the additional discussion, the *Tosefta*, there was a prohibition against 'tying a thread on a person', for it was relegated to the realm of superstitious practice. This realm, *darkei ha-Emori*, the ways of the Emorites, represented those activities directly opposed to God's laws. Demons and witches, diviners and soothsayers, sorcerers and necromancers, those who practised incest and idolatry, all were associated with Gehinnom, the disordered realm.

Several demons give their own names to diseases, and *kordiakos*, *shabriri* and *papi shila bar sumki* are some examples given in the Talmud. The demon *tzarda* was feared because 'whoever rests his head on the stump of a palm tree, the *tzarda* spirit grabs, or seizes, him'.<sup>58</sup> However, once the name of the disease-demon is known, an amulet can be written against the affliction. In the Talmudic discussion of the 'case-study' regarding *kordiakos*, an affliction causing confusion, the patient expresses a desire to divorce his wife, but this is not permitted if a man is judged not to be in command of his senses. Unsure of the reason for the patient's confusion, the Rabbis considered drunkenness as a possible cause. This essential doubt as to the cause led to the quoting and framing of the earlier, Mishnaic phrase before applying the later discussion in Gemara. Thus reliance on the 'mode of expression' indicates how the passage should be interpreted; that is, the way in which the initial problem was described, offers the clue to the affliction. Because the word 'seized', *achaz*, is used, the attack is assumed to be demonic and the demon is named *kordiakos*. The Talmudic text reads:



*MISHNAH:*

IF A MAN IS *SEIZED* WITH A *KORDIAKOS* AND SAYS, WRITE A GET [divorce contract] FOR MY WIFE, HIS WORDS ARE OF NO EFFECT. IF HE SAYS, WRITE A GET FOR MY WIFE AND IS THEN *SEIZED* WITH A *KORDIAKOS* AND THEN SAYS, DO NOT WRITE IT, HIS LATER WORDS ARE OF NO EFFECT. IF HE IS STRUCK DUMB, AND WHEN THEY SAY TO HIM, SHALL WE WRITE A GET FOR YOUR WIFE, HE NODS HIS HEAD, HE IS TESTED WITH THREE QUESTIONS. IF HE SIGNIFIES ‘NO’ AND ‘YES’ PROPERLY EACH TIME, THEN THE GET SHOULD BE WRITTEN AND GIVEN FOR HIM.

*GEMARA:*

What is *kordiakos*? Samuel said: Being overcome by new wine from the vat. Then why does it not say, If one is overcome by new wine? The mode of expression teaches us that this spirit, *rucha*, [which causes the dizziness] is called *kordiakos*. Of what use is this [knowledge]? *For a charm, kemaya, or amulet.*<sup>59</sup>

(Gittin 67b)

A spell for the amulet against *kordiakos* is not given in the text, and the section concludes ‘What is the remedy for it? Red meat broiled on the coals, and wine highly diluted’. The spell on the amulet might not work, so a practical remedy is immediately supplied.

Demons were thought to cause eye-problems and nosebleeds. The importance of the ability to read and write the texts, to impart knowledge of those texts to pupils and to write opinions on court and legal matters is reflected in the many remedies for eye-ailments. Water that had been exposed overnight was considered dangerous for drinking purposes, and could cause blurred vision or a type of night-blindness, *shabriri*. This was considered a demonic affliction, and the spell itself utilized the name of the demon. The sympathetic magic of the spell causes a diminution of the demon’s power, by the gradual disappearance of the naming-word<sup>60</sup>:

*SHABRIRI**BRIRI**RIRI**IRI**RI*

A similar pattern is found on a sixth-century amulet probably from Christian Egypt, to protect a house from wild creatures:

THE DOOR

APHRODITE  
PHRODITE  
RODITE  
ODITE  
DITE  
ITE  
TE  
E

*Hor, Hor, Phor Phor, YAO SABAOTH ADONAI, I bind you, Artemisian scorpion. Free this house of every reptile and annoyance, at once, at once. St Phocas is here.*<sup>61</sup>

It is interesting to note the influence of Jewish magic on this amulet, not only in the style, but also in the quotation of the Hebrew formula, Yao Sabaoth Adonai, ['Lord of Hosts Lord'.]

Another remedy for removing the evil spirit of *shabriri* is given:

Take a rope of white strands, tie one end to the patient's leg and the other to the leg of a dog. Young boys should cast potsherds after him, exclaiming 'Heal, dog! Hide the cock!' Let him take seven pieces of meat from seven houses, place them in the door-socket, and eat them upon the dung-hills of the town. Then untie the rope and say, 'Blindness (*shabriri*) of N son of the female N, leave N son of the female N.' Then the pupil, or eye-socket of the dog is pierced.

(Gittin 69a)

In this remedy a specific ceremony using symbolic rites, symbolic animals, the number seven and an adjuration of the demon itself are used.

The danger of exsanguination is recognized in the variety of remedies available to cure nosebleeds. Some of the remedies use sympathetic magic, while others combine magic with seemingly practical actions:

For blood which flows from the nostrils:

One should bring a Priest (Kohen) whose name is Levi and write Levi backwards to stop the patient's nosebleed; or any man should write backwards: "*I Papi Shila bar Sumki*, meaning son of the red one, that is the *blood demon* . . ."

(Preuss 1993: 297)

Sympathetic magic is evident here, in the use of writing backwards, where words themselves were given the power to reverse the bloodflow. The hierarchical power of a priest, *kohen*, or the priestly tribe itself, *Levi*, was utilized, and the name of the demon could be part of the incantation.

When the incantation-spell against the demon did not work, the use of sym-

pathetic magic was sometimes combined with a more practical remedy (as in the case of *kordiakos*, above) and both were utilized in Talmudic healing incantations aimed at physically staunching the flow of a nosebleed:

Take clover root and the rope of an old bed and papyrus and saffron and the red part of a palm branch, and burn them to ashes. Then make two threads from sheep's wool, steep them in vinegar, roll them in the ashes and place them in the nostrils.

The next remedy is a combination of magic and medical art, using the flowing water of a canal as a device indicating control over the bloodflow. The canal would have been a common feature in the irrigation systems of Mesopotamia:

The patient should look for a canal which flows from east to west and stand astride over it, so that one foot is on either side. Then he should pick up some mud with his right hand from under his left foot, and with his left hand from under his right foot, and twine two threads of wool, and rub them in the mud, and place them in his nostrils.

Sympathetic magic and a traditional adjuration-formula are also given as possible cures:

The patient should sit under a gutter-pipe while people bring water and pour it over him, saying: 'As these waters stop flowing, so may the blood of N son of the woman N, stop flowing.'

(Gittin 69a)

The use of symbolic animals or substances, or even placing the body itself in an apparently favourable symbolic situation, together with the magical adjurations, feature in these rituals.

Sympathetic magic was also used in conjunction with the rarely used remedy for eye ailments, a pain-inducing potion called *sam* or *samma*. Samuel, Rebbe's personal physician, wished to fill his eye with *samma*, but Rebbe refused, saying 'I cannot bear it'. Samuel then wished to apply an ointment, which Rebbe refused as well. So Samuel placed a phial of the *samma* constituents under his pillow and by means of this sympathetic magic, he was healed.<sup>62</sup>

### *Treatment for fevers*

A famous catalogue of symptoms and therapies follows the Gemara discussion of *kordiakos*, and is styled in the Akkadian mode that moves downwards through the body, starting with the head, listing and describing ailments. Remedies against fever are given, and Rabbi Abaye's mother, who was credited with

several Talmudic remedies, distinguished and classified the types of fever that might require treatment. The discussion opens with Abaye's remark that

My mother told me that for a sun-stroke [fever] the remedy is on the first day to take a jug of water, [if it lasts] two days to let blood, [if] three days to take red meat broiled on the coals and highly diluted wine.

(Gittin 67b)

(The latter remedy is, noticeably, a repeat of the treatment for *kordiakos*.) Abaye's mother continues:

For a chronic fever, *shimsha attikta*, take a black hen, tear it crosswise, shave the middle of the head of the patient, and place the hen upon his head and leave it there until it begins to smell. Then the patient should get up and stand in water up to his neck until he gets weak, then swim to dry land, get out of the water and sit down. Or, he should eat leek and repeat the water procedure.

(Gittin 67b)

Such remedies are difficult to interpret, but the use of a hen may recall the sacrifice of birds in the Temple. Immersion in water is also part of the purification ritual practised in Temple times, and it calls to mind part of a ritual carried out in very different circumstances, by a Sage who wished to purify himself before adjuring the Prince of the Presence, *Sar ha-Panim*, who sat at God's right hand:

The one who binds himself to make theurgic use of him should sit in fast one day, and before that day he should sanctify himself seven days from seminal emission, dip himself in the water-canal, and not have conversation with his wife. At the end of the days of his fasting and purification, on the day of his fast, he should go down and sit in water up to his neck, and say before he adjures . . . [here follows an adjuration using the forty-two letter Name of God by which the adjurer seals himself for strength and protection from dangerous angels].

(Lesses 1995: 186)

The curious and eclectic mixture of remedies emphasizes Zohar's point quoted above, namely that the Sages recognized the 'inherent ambiguity and multivocality' of the texts with which they busied themselves, and permitted themselves a certain leeway in their approach to diagnosis, acknowledgement of God's powers, the possibility of seizures by demonic forces as well as the somewhat idiosyncratic combination of sympathetic magic and practical remedies.

### The woman in confinement – pregnancy and birth:

The account of the creation of the human species in Genesis shows how God made man ‘in our image, after our likeness’ and how God created man from the dust of the earth and breathed into man’s nostrils the ‘breath of life’, *nishmat hayyim*. The breath of God becomes the ‘spirit of life’, *ruach hayyim*.<sup>63</sup> So, both *neshama* and *ruach* encode the concept of breath, by which life itself is positioned and maintained in the body. The Talmud, however, gives a slightly different view in its consideration of the origin of the human body:

Reflect on three things and you will not come within the ambit of sin: know where you came from and where you are going and before whom you will have to give a reckoning and an account of yourself in the future. Where you came from – a foetid drop; where you are going – a place of dust, worms and maggots; before whom you will in future have to give a reckoning and an account – before the king of kings, the holy one, blessed be he.

(Pirque Avot 3: 1)

The ‘foetid drop’ of combined seminal fluid and ovum that will grow to fruition within the female body is the beginning of a partnership between humankind and God in the formation of a new being, while the inevitable decomposition of the flesh is mentioned immediately afterwards. The simple facts of life and death are embedded in the notion that human actions are part of a legal process where God is the judge and that one is accountable for one’s inclinations and actions, whether good or bad. The Talmud teaches that there are three who are involved in the creation of the foetus. God provides the soul, breath of life, understanding and intelligence, physical features, speech, sight, hearing, and the power of motion in arms and legs. The father provides the white matter from which are formed the bones, sinews, nails, white of the eye and the brain. The mother provides the red matter from which are formed the skin, the flesh, the hair and the pupil of the eye.<sup>64</sup> When a person dies, the attributes provided by God leave the body first. The Talmud depicts the anguish of mourning parents who cry out to God, ‘as long as Your portion was combined with ours, our portion was protected from maggots and worms; now, however, our portion is cast away and given to the maggot and the worm’.<sup>65</sup>

The Talmud mentions the ‘preserving stone’, *even tequma*, an amulet that would protect the pregnant woman from evil spirits that might cause miscarriage. In addition, cohabitation was thought to be harmful to both foetus and mother during the first three months of pregnancy, harmful to the mother but beneficial to the foetus during the second trimester, and beneficial to both during the final months of pregnancy.<sup>66</sup> Not only was the sex of the child determined at conception, but certain characteristics such as strength, intelligence and wealth were also fixed.

*Order and disorder in procreation*

Procreation is the first ordinance in Torah, so there is an emphasis on continuation of family, tribe and people, for God says: *You shall be fruitful and multiply, p'ru u-revu.*<sup>67</sup> While moral or ethical attributes are not pre-determined, (for the Rabbis stated that 'Everything is in the power of heaven, except the fear of Heaven'<sup>68</sup>), two 'inclinations' are vested in the human being – the good, *yetzer ha-tov*, and the evil, *yetzer ha-ra*.<sup>69</sup> The relationship between three constructs, namely the Evil Inclination, Satan (the Tempter or Accuser) and Death, embodies a constant reminder of the battle in which the soul engages to maintain its existence as life within the body and to remain connected to that body. Eve's unfortunate encounter with the Serpent in the Garden of Eden led to an ambiguous situation. God had issued his first commandment to Adam and Eve: Be fruitful and multiply. But He had then also decreed that mortality become the fate of humankind, so the Rabbis declared that 'Satan, the *Yetzer ha-Ra* [the evil inclination] and the Angel of Death are all one'.<sup>70</sup> One of the aspects of the *yetzer ha-ra* was the urge to procreate, for without this, humanity would die out. Thus Satan exists as a constant challenge to humans, tempting them with the evil inclination which fulfils God's purpose in ensuring reproduction, while ultimately the Angel of Death also fulfils God's purpose in his punishment of Adam and Eve.

The Sages believed that 'he who does not indulge in the propagation of the species is as though he sheds blood'.<sup>71</sup> Men and women are expected to produce children in marriage, and in the case of a childless widow, the brother of her late husband should marry her in order to continue the family line in levirate marriage:

Er, Judah's first-born, was displeasing to the Lord, and the Lord took his life. Then Judah said to Onan, 'Join with your brother's wife and do your duty by her as a brother-in-law, and provide offspring for your brother.' But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it *spoil* on the ground whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother. What he did was displeasing to the Lord, and He took his life also.

(Genesis 38: 7–10)

The usual translation for the misdirected seed is commonly given as '(he) let it *spill* on the ground', whereas the correct meaning, as above, is *spoil*. The plain understanding of this biblical passage is that the description of 'onanism' should be interpreted as a prohibition against masturbation, *coitus interruptus*, or more generally, any failure or refusal to procreate.

But the Talmudic interpretation does not consider these prohibitions as particularly salient. Instead, the Talmud gives an interpretation which, I think, relates to the prohibition of what Durkheim called 'undue mixings', as actions

that are improperly carried out, or seeds improperly sown. The verses are interpreted by the Rabbis as describing an act of unnatural sexual intercourse where seed is not where it should have been because the very manner of its 'sowing' is improper. The phrase used for Onan's act in the Talmudic interpretation is *hash'chatat zera* – improper emission of seed, or the destruction, corruption, or spoilage of seed, or *hotza'at zera le-vatalah*, seed exuding in needless waste. Here the message of an original Torah text is, typically, re-worked or rendered more complex in the Talmud, and the notion that there is a proper manner in which sperm should be treated is contrasted with an improper treatment.<sup>72</sup> The message of order in sexual matters is further clarified: the behaviour of a man who engaged in marital union 'as if he were coerced by a demon', *ke'ilu kefa'o shed*, was not to be recommended and the connection between an evil spirit and disordered, improper behaviour is highlighted.

However, this does not mean that the Rabbis forbade sexual enjoyment simply because strict rules regarding domestic life were to be obeyed. To the contrary, the Sages believed that when a husband unites with his wife in holiness, the Divine Presence abides with them.<sup>73</sup> Although *coitus interruptus* was forbidden, certain acts of sexual union labelled 'unnatural intercourse' were permitted. The Talmud tells of a woman who approached Rabbi Judah, complaining that 'I prepared the table for him, but he overturned it', to which the Rabbi replied that Torah gives permission for a 'man to do with his wife what he will'.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, the Talmud advises moderation in all appetites, because 'appetite grows with the eating'.<sup>75</sup> Rabbi Yochanan wrote: 'There is a small organ in man; he who satisfies it goes hungry and he who allows it to hunger is satisfied'.<sup>76</sup> The Rabbis adopted a pragmatic if somewhat hypocritical approach to the satisfaction of the male sexual urge:

Rab Ilay teaches: 'If a man realizes that his evil instinct is stronger than he is, he should go to a place where he is not known, dress in dark clothes, wrap his head in a dark turban and do that which his heart demands, but he should not openly profane the name of God.'

(Mo'ed Qatan 17a)

The Sages believed that if sexual relations were not performed in an appropriate manner, not only were the partners at risk, but their offspring as well. They believed that 'he who undergoes bloodletting and soon afterwards has sexual intercourse forfeits his life and his blood is on his own head'.<sup>77</sup> In addition, sexual intercourse immediately following phlebotomy would result in 'feeble' or 'nervous' children.<sup>78</sup> Rabbi Yochanan wrote that 'he who has coitis during the daytime is worthy of detestation, for the time of cohabitation is only the nighttime, and particularly during the middle portion of the night'.<sup>79</sup> The dangers to the unborn child were also articulated in certain prohibitions connected with sexual intercourse. 'He who cohabits while in a sitting position is afflicted with delirium . . . [and] he who has coitis near a kindled light is worthy of abhorrence

... his children become epileptic'.<sup>80</sup> If a man returns from a journey and immediately indulges in marital intercourse, 'his children will become ill if his wife becomes pregnant from this intercourse'.<sup>81</sup> 'When marital partners cohabit on a bed on which an awake infant child is lying, then this child will become epileptic'.<sup>82</sup>

### The mourner – association with death

The Talmudic tractate *Semachot*, literally, 'rejoicings', is the euphemistically named Tractate dealing with customs of death, burial and mourning, also called 'The Great Mourning', or *Evel Rabbati*. Although formulated during the third century CE, the Tractate includes customs that date to at least two hundred years earlier. In the scriptures, the dead are described as being laid to rest with ancestors, 'gathered to their fathers'.<sup>83</sup> Mourners did not wash, anoint themselves or wear shoes and ornaments. Having torn their garments, they sat upon the earth wearing sackcloth, with heads bared and smeared with ash. This intensive period of mourning lasted for seven days. In the earliest texts, there is no mention of an afterlife, but during Second Temple times the belief in physical resurrection and the immortality of the soul gradually pervaded Pharisaic beliefs. There was an 'eschatological hope against the backdrop of increasingly harsh conditions. . . . Among most of the Pharisees, a sinless state seems to have been considered a prerequisite for resurrection'.<sup>84</sup>

According to the Talmud, the 'phase' entered before death is accorded a special classification. When generalized debility begins, the dying patient is called a *gossès*. The *gossès* is treated in a particular fashion and special laws regulate the actions which may or may not be carried out on the person of a *gossès*. The prohibited actions are those associated with the definitively deceased, and which *are* performed in laying out a corpse. 'One does not tie up his cheek bones, or stop up his apertures (anus and nose), or place a metal vessel or anything which chills on his navel, until he is definitely dead'.<sup>85</sup> The *gossès* may not be moved or placed upon sand or salt until death has taken place. His eyes may not be closed, and the Rabbis held that whoever touched or moved the *gossès* was a murderer. Rabbi Meir used the following analogy: 'He who touches a flickering lamp extinguishes it'.<sup>86</sup> The corpse is never left unaccompanied after death and is provided with an entourage or escort, *levayyah*, to the final resting place.

Death comes in many ways and the rabbis reckoned that there were nine hundred and three varieties of death. The worst was croup, which was likened to the experience of having 'a thorn in a ball of clipped wool which tears backwards' in the throat, or was like whirling waters at the entrance of a canal. The easiest form of death was the 'kiss' of death, likened to 'taking a hair out of milk'.<sup>87</sup> The person about to die is approached by the angel of death, who is covered with staring eyes. The angel carries a sword dripping gall and as he stands above an invalid, the terrible sight causes the dying person to open his



mouth in fright, whereupon a drop of gall falls into the mouth, the person dies, and ‘the corpse gives forth an evil odour and the face turns ghastly pale’.<sup>88</sup> This legend is reflected in mourning practice, for between the late second century CE and the first half of the third century, Rabbi Yohanan bar Naph‘ha stated that ‘For seven days the sword is drawn, up to thirty, it is wavering, after twelve months, it returns to its scabbard’.<sup>89</sup>

In Torah law, delay in burial is forbidden, so it is important to know exactly when death has occurred. When it is absolutely clear that spontaneous, involuntary breathing can no longer take place, the person is defined as *halakhically* dead. It was supposed that the soul of a righteous person went to *Gan Eden*, the Garden of Eden, while the soul of a wicked person went to *Gehinnom*, the zone where idolatrous practices and *darkei ha-Emori*, superstitious acts involving witchcraft and demonic activities, took place.<sup>90</sup> A Talmudic tale expounds on this:

When Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai took ill, his students entered to visit him. When he saw them he began to weep. His students said to him: Light of Israel, Rightmost Pillar [a reference to one of the two Temple pillars named *Boaz* and *Yachin*], Mighty Hammer, why do you weep? . . . He said to them: Now that they are leading me before the King who reigns over all kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, who lives and endures for ever and ever, if He puts me to death, His death is an everlasting death and I am unable to appease Him with words nor to bribe Him with money and not only that, but there lie before me two paths, one of the *Gan Eden* and one of *Gehinnom* and I know not on which they will lead me, and should I not weep?

(Berachot 28b)

The zones described in scriptures as the Garden of Eden, *Gan Eden*, and the Netherworld, *She‘ol*, were later subsumed during the Talmudic era into the Seventh Celestial region, *Pardes*, or paradise, and the hellish zone of *Gehinnom*. The souls of those who are to be born and the souls of the just and righteous are to be found in the seventh heaven, *Aravot*, and at death, the soul is severed from its physical home and is transported to the seventh heaven, the treasury that exists under God’s Throne of Glory, *kisei ha-kavod*, whence it initially came before it entered the pleasures and travails of the physical life.

After death, the soul was thought to hover above its body in the netherworld for three days, and it likewise mourned its body for seven days. The soul would then ascend and descend between *Aravot* and the place of interment until the body had decomposed. When only bones were left, the soul ascended for the last time.<sup>91</sup> The Talmudic Sages considered ‘the *shiv‘ah*, the seven-day period of mourning . . . especially stringent on the day of burial and for the next two days. During *shiv‘ah*, mourners stayed away from work, sitting at home on low couches, heads covered, receiving the condolences of relatives and friends. The

*shloshim*, the thirty-day period, forbade mourners to leave town, cut their hair, or attend social gatherings'.<sup>92</sup> During the Herodian period, the bones were gathered from the tomb twelve months after the death, and placed in a stone ossuary.

### ***Burial***

The custom of burying the bones of the dead in ossuaries was typical of the Chalcolithic period and, in a repetition of ancient custom, was also practised in Jerusalem during the Second Temple period.<sup>93</sup> The complex procedures involved in the early ossuary burials, the shapes of the ossuaries and their symbolic imagery have yet to be satisfactorily explained by archaeologists and palaeontologists. However one factor that is standard is that the shape of the ossuary must accommodate the longest bone in the body, the femur, and must allow for the proportions of the ribcage and skull.

Rahmani has suggested that the practice of secondary burial, or *ossilegium*, in Jerusalem and in other places in Judaea (Jericho, the coastal plain, the Galilee), has its roots in Talmudic beliefs. Because the Pharisees believed that only the person free of sin would enter *Gan Eden*, they subscribed to the notion that the decomposition of the flesh was so painful a process that sins were forgiven as the flesh fell from the bones of the skeleton.<sup>94</sup> The notion of pain as a source of beneficial power is echoed in the Talmudic belief that the body was 'cleansed' by illness and this cleansing action also extended to the spirit, so that sins were forgiven during illness.<sup>95</sup> The particularly violent agonies associated with intestinal diseases, *choli me'ayim*, ensured that those who suffered abdominal pains would be forgiven all their sins and would not go to *Gehinnom*.<sup>96</sup> It was considered a good omen if someone died of *choli me'ayim*, as a person suffering this affliction was regarded as having been pious.<sup>97</sup>

Goldberg describes the rites of burial in first- and second-century Palestine:

The prevailing custom was to conduct two interments, the first at the time of death, the second approximately one year later. At the first interment, the body was placed in a funeral chamber or the substructure of the cemetery until its flesh was eaten away. As long as the deceased was still identifiable, no-one was permitted to touch the body. After this period, which lasted approximately one year, the gathering together of the bones and their placement in the ossuary represented the final burial. In the presence of the deceased's family, the bones were gathered one by one, put on a sheet, and deposited in small covered coffers made of limestone. These can still be seen in situ in the burial caves on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. These ossuaries date back to the period of the Second Temple. . . . Whether Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or bilingual, the inscriptions mention only the name or family status of the deceased: 'Mama' or 'Dostos, our father; do not open'. For final burial,

the laws prescribed that close relatives repeat the rites of the primary burial and observe mourning practices for one day.

(Goldberg, S-A: 1996: 15)

After the body had lain in the burial cave for twelve months, the bones were collected for *ossilegium*. The Talmud states that a person may gather the bones of all dead, except those of *his* parents.<sup>98</sup>

And Rabbi Meir said: ‘A man collects the bones of his father and mother, because it is a gladness to him . . . when the flesh had decayed, they collected the bones and buried them in an ossuary. That day (the son) kept (again) full mourning rites, but the following day he was glad, because his forebears rested from judgment.’

(Yerushalmi Mo‘ed Qatan 1: 80c)

This custom passed from father to son, as described by Rabbi Eleazar bar Zadok, who lived around CE 80–110. He said:

Thus spoke father at the time of his death: ‘My son, bury me at first in a pit. In the course of time, collect my bones and put them in an ossuary; but do not gather them with your own hands.’ And thus did I attend him: Johanan entered, collected the bones and spread a sheet over them. I then came in, rent my clothes for them and sprinkled dried herbs over them. Just as he attended his father, so I attended him.

(Rahmani 1981: 175. Evel Rabbati 12: 9)

The custom of *likkut atzamat*, the gathering of bones, was advised by Rabbi Akiva, who, fearing an ‘undue mixing’, or forbidden mingling of bones, decreed that neither winding sheets nor wooden ossuaries should be used in burial: ‘In the course of time the sheet will waste away, in the course of time the bones will intermingle. Let them rather be gathered and placed in (stone) ossuaries’.<sup>99</sup> Belief in complete physical resurrection required the entire skeleton to be set aside from other skeletons so that no confusion would ensue. However, Rabbi Judah allowed that ‘Whomsoever a person may sleep with when he is living, he may be buried with when he is dead’.<sup>100</sup> So husband and wife, or perhaps even immediate family, could rest together until they were resurrected.

Such carefully organized funerary and memorial practices indicate yet another attempt by the rabbinic authorities to invest a semblance of order when dealing with that most unpredictable aspect of human existence, death, often preceded by the uncertainties and horrors of war or disease.

*The soul and the afterlife*

The Talmudic view on God and his creation involved a theory of macrocosm and microcosm, for the Rabbis believed that just as God fills the universe, seeing but not seen, the soul, as the *neshama*, the breath which God breathed into Adam, fills the body, enabling the body to perceive, yet is not itself perceived.<sup>101</sup> The soul was of interest to the Rabbis, as they subscribed to the Pharisaic notions of physical resurrection and the immortality of the soul. God's future judgement of a person's soul motivated the rabbinic interest in the locus of the soul after death.<sup>102</sup> The Rabbis believed that as God had given to mankind the gift of a soul, so that soul should be treated with the respect normally rendered to a guest.<sup>103</sup> There is, according to Elior, evidence for the influence of Hellenistic ideas on the rabbinic concept of the soul as 'an entity having a spiritual character and as a fixed, defined metaphysical element', while the development within Jewish thought of 'a transcendental view of history and the meaning of human existence . . . (viewing) the soul as existing on a spiritual plane' is clearly connected to Greek ideas of 'the soul as belonging to the realm of the divine, infinite, and eternal, and the body to the realm of the material, finite, and mortal'.<sup>104</sup>

**Discussion**

Fear of the influence of malign spirits upon the body gave rise to several methods of protection and prevention against demons in Talmudic texts. Reliance upon the use of symbolic animals, together with various plants or vegetables, many echoing the Akkadian medical recipes, appears in the medical texts of *Aggada*. However, faith in incantations, mystical numbers and the 'association of ideas' is demonstrated in descriptions of rites allied to sympathetic magic. The special leeway given to the use of apparently unorthodox methods in combating the forces of confusion and disorder symbolized by evil spirits indicates a pragmatism in Rabbinic attitudes to attempts at rectifying the ambiguity of the states of the sick, the mourner and others in marginal and dangerous conditions. This pragmatic attitude to ceremonies and rites other than the ritualized, set orthodox prayer, highlights the opposition between the power of God and the power of man. The influence of God's Law, as in Torah and *halakhah*, is opposed to the efficacy of the medical or magical remedies found in the *Aggada* texts of the Talmud. Following the *halakhah* is patently *not* a total guarantee of good health or good fortune, so the policy of pragmatism evident in Rabbinic thought and practice is the result of a desire, not only to prolong human life, but also to offer an alternative palliative. The men who produced the Mishna and Gemara, although completely convinced of God's ultimate omnipotence, nevertheless allowed for the skills of the physician to be of benefit to the patient in the interest of *piku'ach nefesh*, the saving of an endangered human life.<sup>105</sup> But they also allowed for the use of amulets, both written and herbal, as both preventive and cure.<sup>106</sup>

However, another interpretation of the pragmatism found in rabbinic attitudes appears to be associated with the worldview of the Sages. Just as orthodox rites of cultic practice are a reflection of society itself, so too do rituals associated with ill-health or misfortune reflect the *Weltanschauung* of the people who practise those rituals. The confusion and disorder brought about by evil spirits or witches should be confronted with the most powerful weapons available in the symbolic armory, and the Rabbis recognized the array of God's own powerful angelic cohorts as ably equipped to deal with these dangerous entities. Appeals to, and utilization of heavenly assistance when performed outside the normal prayer-forms could well be perceived as quasi-magical. But divinely sanctioned order in the hands of angels and their healing powers ensured Rabbinic endorsement for such rites as described in Talmudic and other texts.

## APPROXIMATING GOD, APPROPRIATING AUTHORITY

### *Hekhalot* and *Merkava* literature

*Hekhalot* and *Merkava* literature reflects the creativity and imagination of non-Talmudic rabbinic thought during the first and second centuries CE, the texts vividly portraying the relationship between the practitioners of early Judaism and their God. Although authorship of these texts cannot be ascribed to any particular person, the source of inspiration is undoubtedly Talmudic.<sup>1</sup> It is thought that the texts have their origin in Palestine, but there are also opinions that suggest a Babylonian source for both origins and redaction of the texts.<sup>2</sup>

The rabbinic period saw a subtle and significant development of the traditional view of the scriptures from ‘ancient Israelite’ belief into a variation of the religion that may be called ‘early Judaism’. At the same time as more conventional Talmudic material was occupying the Rabbis, the *Hekhalot* literature, emerging directly from ideas discussed in the Talmud, demonstrates a continuing perception of God as a deity constantly concerned with the lives of his people. A new cosmology was invented in order to gain access to magical, holy power. A fascinating link between sacred literature, non-sacred literature and the world of the magician or healer who used the motifs of these texts in his amulets and magic spells becomes evident.

Ezekiel’s vision of the Heavenly Chariot served as a seminal source both for the rabbinic speculations on God’s celestial kingdom, and the enigmatic anonymous body of writings that described the heavenly kingdom in great detail. The *Hekhalot* and *Merkavah* literature, or ‘Heavenly Hall’ and ‘Chariot’ literature, is religious poetry containing invocations and adjurations and, because of its supernatural and other-worldly characteristics, has been designated by contemporary scholars as ‘mystical’. *Hekhalot* literature is centred on notions of God’s holiness, his own great power and the might of his cohorts of angelic warriors. The literature is filled with magical incantations, mystical invocations, lists of obscure divine names, esoteric and occult rituals and hymns of angelic praise and exaltation. Based on Talmudic speculations on the origins of creation, the *Hekhalot* texts portray God in anthropomorphic terms and the descriptions of his kingdom and of his control of nature and supernature provide an alternative to the Book of Genesis, so that the simplistic version of creation written in Early Antiquity is superseded by a vivid ‘scientific’ treatise of Late Antiquity.<sup>3</sup>

Genesis tells of the creation of heaven and earth, and while the physical elements of earthly existence are apparent to humans, the mysteries of the ‘firmaments’ are hidden. To know those mysteries constituted wisdom, *chokhma*, or *gnosis*, or *scientia*. The *Hekhalot* texts depict a visionary hierarchy of power with God as king, ruling over his angel-cohorts in the celestial ‘palaces’, the *hekhlat*. The angels have access to powers of persuasion that represent exactly those attributes which the authors, as utilizers of the texts, were anxious to possess. At the zenith is God, sitting on his throne. The throne rests on a chariot borne by bizarre living beings, the *hayyot*. Ministering to God at all times are myriads of angels that are created continuously and eternally in a zone of seven palaces, or *hekhlat*, and the zone itself is above nature – the supernatural *par excellence*.

### Sources and examples of the texts

Scholem was probably the most influential writer and scholar to bring this body of literature to public attention. It is a rich and evocative genre that had been designated ‘esoteric’ and, in a sense, forbidden as a result of the Talmudic prohibition against the open study of these texts by the majority of people. The prohibition is stated in the Mishnah and sets out three ‘rulings’ that classify scholars in a typically Talmudic mnemonical formula, enumerating ‘three . . . two . . . one’, signifying that more, not less than, the stipulated number are required as appropriate to study:

- 1 Leviticus chapters 18 and 20, dealing with forbidden sexual relations, may not be discussed by three (persons)
- 2 Genesis chapters 1: 2 and 2: 3, regarding the *Ma’aseh B’reshit*, matters dealing with the Creation, may not be discussed by two (persons); and
- 3 the *Merkavah*, the Chariot that bears the throne of God, by one (person), unless he is a scholar and has understood ‘on his own’.<sup>4</sup> The chapters of Leviticus, in (1) above, will not be discussed here, as I shall concentrate on the relevant ideas from the first chapters of both Genesis and Ezekiel.

A specialist in *Hekhalot* literature would be a scholar who has read and studied the Torah (the Five Books of Moses), the Prophets and Writings (that is, the entire *Tanakh*), as well as the *Mishnah*, *Midrashim*, *Halakhot* and *Aggadot*, and who is observant regarding every law of Torah, both negative and positive, and all the admonitions, as handed to Moses on Mount Sinai, in which are contained the laws, statutes and instructions regarding the Israelite system of ritual practice. Such a person is deemed to be one who has ‘understood’ the nature of normative Judaism by dint of his own dedication, involvement and observance. A specialist is therefore a person of high intelligence, of prodigious memory and of total commitment to the religious beliefs of early Judaism.

The ‘creation’ and the ‘chariot’, in constituting the power and essence of God, were the subjects of much rabbinic speculation and this speculation has been labelled ‘mysticism’. The language of the texts is highly evocative and as vigorous as any prior scriptural descriptions of God’s dynamic glory. The quest for wisdom was at the heart of rabbinic speculation and the way to acquire wisdom was from the source itself – God in heaven. To reach God, the Sage had to journey through the celestial world, eventually reaching the *Merkavah*, the chariot that carried God on his throne. These Sages were called *Yordei Merkavah*, ‘descenders to, or in, the chariot’. [sing. *yored merkavah*.]

Scholem includes in the considerable corpus of *Hekhalot* texts *Ra’ayot Yechezkiel* (The Visions of Ezekiel), *Hekhalot Zutarti* (The Lesser *Hekhalot*), *Hekhalot Rabbati* (The Greater *Hekhalot*), *Merkava Rabbah* (Great Chariot) and *Shi’ur Qomah* (Measure of the Body).<sup>5</sup>

Although the vision of Ezekiel does not mention the word *Merkavah* (chariot), this vision is, nevertheless, the primary source of ‘*Hekhalot* and *Merkavah*’ literature.<sup>6</sup> The visionary experiences that focus on God’s physicality all rest on the core symbol of a sapphire pavement or throne. This symbol is described on three occasions in the *Tanakh*, but only Ezekiel’s vision, which elaborates on the sapphire as well as other glittering attributes, generates the ideas of a mythical kingdom that will lead to the creation of the *Hekhalot* texts. The vision Ezekiel experienced during his exile in Babylon had its conceptual roots in earlier encounters with God by other visionaries. Moses and the elders saw God at Sinai, and also saw that under God’s feet was a sapphire pavement. Isaiah saw God in his Temple, enrobed and enthroned and surrounded by fiery angels, the *s’rafim*.<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel’s vision completes and elaborates on the depiction of this heavenly place. The throne itself is of sapphire, as if extending upwards from the pavement seen by Moses and the elders. The throne is borne not by the *s’rafim* seen by Isaiah, but by *hayyot*, or forms of life, which are strange, winged figures with human and animal features. They carry a blazing, flashing object equipped with wheels that turn in various directions, and within the wheels themselves are many eyes which lend an air of terror to the image as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

The central, polysemic images in this literature are those of light and fire. God, who spoke to Moses from within an inextinguishable burning bush, now rides upon his throne of amber or *hashmal*, a metal called ‘electrum’, made of silver and gold.<sup>9</sup> The angels, too, are ablaze, for they are born of fire. The vision sets the stage for further speculation on God and his kingdom. In all cases where God appears in a vision, that quality of ‘separateness’ which sets him afar from all else, that is, his holiness, is emphasized. The *s’rafim* that Isaiah beheld furnish a detail of crucial relevance to the subsequent *Hekhalot* texts. The *s’rafim* enunciate the tris-hagion, or *qedusha*, glorifying God. Their chorus of ‘*qadosh, qadosh, qadosh*’ – ‘holy, holy, holy’ – reverberates throughout the literature, giving it the significance of prayer and praise that has its echoes in the litany of both heaven and earth. The intimate relationship between the *yordei merkavah* and God is illustrated in the following excerpt from *Hekhalot Rabbati*,



where God himself, relating in the terms of physical and spiritual love to his people Israel, is the speaker:

For in the hour when you speak before me 'holy', I stoop over it, embrace, fondle and kiss it, and my hands [lie] upon his arms, three times, when you speak before me 'holy', as it is said, 'Holy, holy, holy [is the Lord of Hosts]'.  
 (Schäfer 1992: 46)

This revelation of God's very private emotions parallels the special relationship he has with his *hayyot ha-qodesh*, the holy creatures who bear the *Merkavah*, and reinforces the significance to the Sages and the people of Israel as a whole, of reciting daily prayers. The importance of reciting prayers in the correct manner, *ketiqno*, is demonstrated by the fact that when the angels, who also recite the *qedushah*, do so correctly, they are crowned with splendid crowns; however, if they fail to recite in perfect harmony, 'God extends his little finger and burns them; then the Holy One, blessed be he, opens his mouth, speaks one word and creates others instead of them ...'.<sup>10</sup> The *hayyot ha-qodesh* are described in *Hekhalot Zutarti*:

Their gait is like the appearance [of the lightning], their appearance is like the appearance of the rainbow in the cloud, their faces are like the appearance of the bride, their wings are like the radiance of the clouds of glory.  
 (Schäfer 1992: 62)

*Hekhalot Rabbati* describes part of the daily services of *Shacharit* and *Minchah*, the morning and afternoon prayers that take place in the heavens. During the *Shacharit* prayer, God reveals his face, and the *hayyot* cover theirs, while the opposite occurs later:

Every day when the *Minchah* prayer approaches, [the] adorned king sits and praises the *hayyot*. Even before the speech from his mouth is complete, the *hayyot ha-qodesh* come forth under the throne of glory, from their mouths the fullness of rejoicing, with the wings the fullness of exaltation; their hands play [instruments] and their feet dance; they walk around and surround, one in front and one from behind. They embrace and kiss him and reveal their countenance; they reveal, but the king of glory covers his countenance.  
 (Schäfer 1992: 22)

The imagery of supernatural events and fire connected with the chariot is echoed in certain tractates of the Talmud. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Eleazar ben 'Arakh discussed their experiences regarding *Ma'aseh Merkavah* or

‘Works of the Chariot’. While expounding on the theme, flames surrounded Eleazar, and ministering angels danced before them ‘as members of a wedding rejoice before a bridegroom’ while ‘forthwith all the trees opened their mouths and sang a song’.<sup>11</sup>

The Qumran community reproduced not only the traditional, ancient texts of the *Tanakh*, but also their own, esoteric ‘sectarian’ texts that defined their ascetic, monastic way of life, lived on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. Although this community was isolated physically from the main body of religious practice, that is, the Temple in Jerusalem, it was obviously influenced by the current rabbinic philosophical and cosmogonic ideas.<sup>12</sup> A psalm fragment found at Masada, but of the Qumran corpus, indicates that the philosophy of *Hekhalot* was known to the Zealots at Masada during the final days of the revolt against the Romans.

The psalm is formulaic and its liturgical and magical overtones, with repetitions of the number seven and recognition of God as king, are striking:

[Psalm of exaltation (uttered) by the tongue] of the third of the sovereign Princes, an exaltation . . . He shall exalt the God of the angels on high seven times with seven wonderful exaltations. Psalm of praise (uttered) by the tongue of the four[th] to the Mighty One above all the [gods], seven wonderful mighty deeds. He shall praise the God of mighty deeds seven times with seven words of [marvellous] prais[e]. Psalm of thanksgiving (uttered) by the tongue of the fifth to the [K]in[g] of glory with its seven wonderful thanksgivings. He shall thank the God of glory se[ven] times with se[v]e[n] words of wonderful thanksgivings. . . . (etc through numbered ‘sovereign Princes’). . . . In [the name of his holiness] all the [sovereign] Princes [shall bless together] the God of the divine beings [in] all their sevenfold [t]estimonies. . . . Blessed be [the] Lo[r]d, the Kin[g] of all, who is above all blessing and p[raise]. . . .

(Vermes 1990: 223: 4Q403 Ii, 1–29 = *Masada Fragment*)

In another work found at Qumran, the celestial kingdom, the chariot and the praise assigned to the ‘God of Knowledge’ are described:

Praise the God of . . . wonder, and exalt him . . . of glory in the tent of the God of knowledge.

The [cheru]bim prostrate themselves before him and bless. As they rise, a whispered divine voice [is heard], and there is a roar of praise. When they drop their wings, there is a [whisper]ed divine voice. The cherubim bless the image of the throne-chariot above the firmament, [and] they praise [the majes]ty of the luminous firmament beneath his seat of glory. When the wheels advance, angels of holiness come and go. From between his glorious wheels there is as it were a fiery vision

of most holy spirits. About them, the appearance of rivulets of fire in the likeness of gleaming brass, and a work of . . . radiance in many-coloured glory, marvellous pigments, clearly mingled.

(Vermes 1990: 228: 4Q405 20ii 21–2,  
*Songs for the Holocaust of the Sabbath*)

### The celestial realms

In the Genesis creation myth, God created light, the heavens, the celestial bodies, the earth and all plant life, the seas and all that live therein, the birds and other winged creatures that fill the skies, the beasts and creatures that roam the earth, and lastly man and woman. According to the Talmud, however, 974 generations existed before the creation of our world, but because of their wicked ways, these worlds were swept away.<sup>13</sup> Finally God created the world in which we live, and said, ‘The other worlds did not please me, but this one does please me’.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the Rabbis taught that God rules not only our world, but, carried upon the wings of his Cherubs, *keruvim*, he manifests himself in all his cosmic worlds.<sup>15</sup> God issues his commands from behind a curtain, *pargod*, and the ministering angels, *malachei ha-sharet*, fulfil his wishes.<sup>16</sup> Dimensions and distances pertaining to God’s universe are given; for example, the story of the quarrel between the Sun and the Moon is told in tractate *Hullin*. God rebuked the Moon for her obstinacy, diminishing her size to ‘sixty times smaller than the brightness of the sun’.<sup>17</sup> The sun has the honour of being crowned ‘as a bridegroom’ who ‘rides forth every day in a chariot’, accompanied by ministering angels day and night.<sup>18</sup> The stature of God himself is given:

Rabbi Akiva said: *Metatron*, the beloved servant and great prince of testimony said to me: ‘I swear to this testimony about YHWH, the God of Israel . . . that the height of His stature when He sits on the Throne of Glory is 118,000,000 parasangs . . .’

(Elior 1993/4: 9, n. 20)

From his right arm to His left arm there are seventy-seven myriads. From the right eyeball to the left eyeball there are thirty myriads. His cranium is three and one third myriads. The crowns on His head are sixty myriads, corresponding to the sixty myriads of the heads of Israel.

(Scholem 1991: 24)

In the new cosmogony, God has mastery not only over the forces of nature, but also over the angelic forces who dwell in his kingdom. The celestial kingdom comprises: *shamayim*, *villon* or *rakia*, (heaven, containing the sun, moon and stars); *shemei ha-shamayim* or *shechakim*, the heaven of heavens, where the angelic prayers are recited and millstones grind manna for the righteous; *zevul*

(fourth heaven, the abode of Metatron and site of the celestial Jerusalem and Temple); *arafel* (darkness); *aravot* (seventh heaven), and the Throne of Glory. Huge distances, usually five-hundred-year journeys, separate the heavens. Between the heavens of *shechakim* and *aravot* are vast storehouses of snow and hail, together with various punishments that await the wicked, as well as rewards for the righteous.

The *Sefer ha-Razim* and the *Hekhalot* literature resound with information about God's kingdom, but the Talmudic discussion of *Ma'aseh B'rêshit*, the initial work of creation, elaborates more fully on this, even speculating on the manner in which God fills his time since that creation:

The day consists of twelve hours, and during the first four hours the Creator explains to His heavenly hosts the precepts of the Divine law. During the next four hours He is seated on the throne of judgement, judging the actions of his creatures. During the last four hours He is again busy ordaining the sustenance and protection of his creatures. . . . Marriages, too, are, according to Jewish myth, concluded in Heaven under the direction of God Himself.

(Rappoport 1995 vol. I: 4; Avodah Zarah 3b; Mo'ed Katan 18b, Leviticus Rabba 8)

### The angels

Despite the all-encompassing idea of God's invisibility in which the *Tanakh* worldview is grounded, tantalizing hints nevertheless appear throughout the scriptural texts suggesting God's existence in a form that is, somehow, partly visible. In addition we are told of the existence of angels, sometimes described as 'messengers', who are beings that occasionally take on human form in order to deliver a divine message to selected people. The message from God that is delivered by an angel is heard either from a disembodied voice or directly, from an apparition.

When God was busy in the primal act of creation, tradition has it that he created the angels on the third day. So when the text of Genesis states twice that on the third day, 'God saw that this was good', instead of the usual single statement, this double approval from God came either because he considered the day itself as auspicious, or because the creation of the angels specifically rendered it so. The angels, as creatures more perfect than man, were given the privilege of serving God and praising him, crowning him in his glory with their prayers. Nevertheless, the angels, like man, can never be as perfect as God. Humans resemble the angels because 'they have knowledge and can see; they have an erect stature; they converse in the Holy tongue'.<sup>19</sup> However, unlike men, angels do not require food, are not tempted by the evil inclination, the *yetzer ha-ra*, and do not reproduce by procreation. The angels, as servants and messengers of God, are inferior to humankind in that they can be given instructions by those

initiated into the mysteries of the Chariot. Yet the angels are also perceived as superior beings because of the capacities engendered within them by their proximity to God himself. The authors of the texts, God's earth-bound worshippers, write of their 'mystical-angelic counterparts' in the heavenly litany of praise as 'priests of the inner sanctum, *kohanei qarov*, who serve before the King of holiest holiness'.<sup>20</sup> Here, *qarov* shares the root-letters of the word for sacrifice, *qorban*, and depicts drawing near to and consequent closeness to God.

In *Tanakh* texts, the evidence for the existence of God's messengers is solid yet at the same time meagre. The angel, or angels, come and go, and Abraham washes the feet of the messengers who bring him the news that he and Sarah will have a son in their old age, and, even though angels do not require sustenance, he manages to feed his angelic guests. When Jacob wrestles with an angelic apparition, there is real and direct contact between numinous and earthly matter – a contest between angelic 'dust' and Jacob's human flesh, that will, ultimately, return to dust. There is no hint in the Torah of the reality of God's heavenly kingdom. In later texts, the psalmist and prophets describe this in terms that delineate, in the main, God's overall power, encompassing the natural world, the elements, and the universal cosmos. In the language of the *Tanakh*, God is a jealous God of holiness, the Creator and Master of the Universe. Only the chosen few can negotiate with him. The language of the psalmist and the prophets engages with his holy mystery and the glory of his realm.

The *Hekhalot* literature paints a broader picture. Within the *Hekhalot*, palaces or heavenly halls, almost infinite numbers of angels live, the cohorts that protect the King of Heaven. God himself ensures a continuous stream of new angels who spring from a river of fire and flame, the *Nehar di-Nur*, a vigorous and illuminating symbol of God's creative force. Fiery angels, *s'rafim*, attest to this power, and the flames of heaven generate an army of dangerous warrior-angels. The angels are antagonistic to humans and will obey instructions only if addressed by the adept with the correct formulae of names, words and spells. The angels hold 'seals' to the gateways of heaven, and passage through the celestial spheres depends on the possession of these seals. These 'keys' for the mystical ascent are only grudgingly handed over to suitable initiates to the Kingdom of God. The seals derive their significance from their secular role in Babylon, where they were utilized daily in commercial and legal transactions of exchange and contract. The practical value that a seal holds in allowing secure transfer of information, agreements, goods and valuables is used symbolically as a sign of power and trust between man, angel and God, and between the earthly and celestial realms. When a Sage undertook the dangerous journey to the celestial realms, even though he was in a state of ritual purity and had certain knowledge of names and magical seals, the angels presented a threat, for they resented the human intrusion into God's Heavenly Halls, and the Sage would sometimes meet his death.

The angel who stands at God's side is Metatron, the 'Prince of the Presence', *Sar ha-Panim*. But God has also created thousands of angels who perform a cer-

emonial ritual before the King of Heaven. The angels immerse themselves in order to attain ritual purity and they praise God by singing hymns and reciting prayers. These activities result in the ‘attachment of crowns’ to the Godhead. The angels are able to utter the *Shem ha-Meforash*, the ordinarily unutterable name of God, which ensures the efficacy of this great heavenly ceremony. Their knowledge of hymns, names, seals and secrets constitutes the most valuable wisdom revealed to the Rabbis, and this mystical knowledge was adulterated for use in incantations in order to perform magical theurgy. The angels, always male, are mobilized to countermand the malign powers of demons, both male and female. The legends of the Talmud and Midrash give the names of many angels:

*Akatriel* is specially appointed to carry swiftly on his wings the words and innermost thoughts of man to the celestial regions and before the throne of God, whilst *Sandalphon*, who surpasses in height all his heavenly colleagues, passes his time in weaving crowns of glory for his Creator.

(Rappoport 1995 vol. I: 35; Hagigah 13b)

And just as the planets influence the course of nature, so the angels, too, preside over natural occurrences. Thus *Michael* is the prince of snow, *Gabriel* the prince of fire, *Jorkami* prince of hail, *Rahab* is the prince of the sea, *Ridja* the prince of rain.

(Rappoport 1995 vol. I: 35; Baba Batra 74b; Ta’anit 25b)

By pronouncing the *Shem ha-Meforash*, God’s ineffable name, the *yored merkavah*, the ‘descender in the chariot’, or indeed the magician, could dispel the power of a demon. The complicated angelology of *Hekhalot* literature provides the required armoury of divine force necessary for eliminating the dangers of demonic possession or seizure by ‘binding and sealing’ malevolent entities.

### The ritual of ascent

The ritual purity required of the High Priest in order to enter the Holy of Holies in the earthly Temple in Jerusalem provides an exemplar and indicates the state of mental and physical perfection and preparation essential for ascent by the *yored merkava*. These orthodox priestly rites would begin a week before the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest took up residence in a special apartment within the Temple court (*palhedrin*). Together with the elders, he began an intensive study of the details of the sacrificial cult for *Yom Kippur*. The High Priest would guard himself against any defilement by emission of seminal fluid or contact with impure substances or foods. In case of his accidental pollution or, indeed, the death of the High Priest, a deputy priest was appointed to take over his duties. The day before *Yom Kippur*, the elders proceeded with the High

Priest to his chamber in the Temple compound where he joined the other priests. He was exhorted by the priests to perform all the minutiae of the sacrificial cult scrupulously as interpreted by the Pharisees. On the day of atonement, the High Priest himself performed the daily sacrifice (*tamid*) together with the incense offering. After a series of ritual immersions he clothed himself in sacred garments, confessed his and his family's sins, the sins of the Levites and the sins of the twelve tribes. During the ritual, he uttered the holy name of God, and this was repeated ten or thirteen times during the priestly service. Each time the *shem hameforash*, God's holy name, was uttered, the people prostrated themselves and responded 'Blessed be His Name whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever'.<sup>21</sup>

Visions of God were not exclusive to the *yordei merkavah*, the 'descenders in the chariot', for the Talmud tells of priests who had experienced visions when taking incense into the *Qodesh Qodashim* in the Temple on the holiest day of the year. The High Priest Simon ha-Zadiq saw an old man dressed in white every time he entered the inner sanctum on *Yom Kippur*.<sup>22</sup> Another High Priest, Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, while offering the incense, was reported to have seen God himself, '*Akatriel Jah* the Lord of Hosts', on his throne in the *Qodesh Qodashim*.<sup>23</sup> But after the destruction of both temples, the creator was no longer 'at home' in his *bayit* (house or Temple), with its *ulâm* (narthex), *hekhâl* (holy place, or palatial hall) and *d'vîr* (holy of holies, or naos). In addition he was no longer just the *yotzer b'reshit*, bringer-forth of creation, but also the King of Glory, *Melekh ha-Kavod*, the Holy King, *Melekh ha-Qadosh*, of heaven.

The goal of the Rabbis was to journey through the *Hekhalot* and reach the *Merkavah* bearing God's throne to see God's great beauty. The initiated Sages knew exactly how to gain access to this special kingdom, and in creating the *Hekhalot* literature, they described the creation of angels, and the dimensions of the *Hekhalot*, or Heavenly 'Halls' or 'Palaces'. They rejoiced in the power invested in them as adepts who had mastered all the ways and means of ascending to the seventh Heaven where God himself was seated upon his throne. The Sage's knowledge of Torah would be written down in red ink by the scribal angel Gavriel and pinned to the mast of the *merkava* with which he would enter the seventh *hekhâl*. He would also know the appropriate names and possess the correct magical seals to by-pass the angelic gatekeepers.

The ritual began in the evening while the scholar lay in bed and recited the *Shema*, the prayer that highlights the unity of God. Twice the Sage was to arise from his bed, wash his hands and feet twice with water and anoint them with oil, put on his phylacteries and pray, standing before his bed. At the end of the prayers, 'he should sit again on his bed and say, interpret, adjure, mention, decree, and fulfill ShQDHWZYH [untranslated] ...'.<sup>24</sup> The Hebrew word *sh'vua*, means 'swearing on oath', or 'adjuration' and its root, *sheva*, indicates the magical quality of the number seven when enunciating a solemn utterance – *hashva'a*.<sup>25</sup>

To begin the ascent after prayer and purification, the adept would recite the names of God in various combinations. One of the preferred names for the adju-



ration was that of *Sar ha-Torah*, prince of Torah, with whom one would ‘bind oneself’. The preparation for the magical adjuration included sexual abstinence, fasting, ritual baths and prayers.

Hagigah 15b tells how Rabbi Aqiva was ‘found worthy’ and able to utilize the honour granted to him.

R Aqiva said (in *Hekhalot Zutarti*):

Everyone who repeats [that is, learns] this Mishnah and wishes to utter the name [of God] must fast for forty days. He must put his head between his knees until the fast has taken complete hold of him and whisper to the earth and not to heaven, so that the earth will hear and not heaven.

(Schäfer 1992: 154)

After reciting the usual *Amidah*, a prayer said while standing, and preceded traditionally by the performative utterance, ‘Oh Lord open thou my lips and my mouth shall declare thy praise’, the adept was to enunciate a special Midrash-prayer repetitively. This was done while seated for twelve days, fasting all the while. Every time he finished the prayer, he was to stand up, adjure the angels and their king, call each individual prince twelve times and adjure them with the seal, making no errors. Then a long chain of names was to be recited.

*Hekhalot Zutarti* tells of magical powers revealed in a ‘book of wisdom, understanding and perception, the investigation of things above and things below, the hidden things of the Torah, of heaven and of earth, and the secrets, which were given to Moses, son of Amram of the perception of YH YH ’HYH Y’W SB’ WT the God of Israel’.

This ‘book’ is evidence of the chain of esoteric knowledge passed on from Moses to Rabbi Aqiva and his disciples. The crucial knowledge of ‘names’ is emphasized by the belief that when Moses ascended to God, he became aware of the magic names that ensure words of Torah-study were not forgotten. This information was passed on to Rabbi Aqiva so that it could be passed on to his students.<sup>26</sup> Thus ‘the worthy *yored merkavah* is received in the seventh hekhal amiably by the angels and may take a seat in front of the throne of glory’.<sup>27</sup>

Having reached the position of power and glory near God, the *yordei merkava* were then able to utilize, through magical words and phrases, God’s own holy power by means of adjuring certain angelic forces. Obtaining this holy power would enable the adept to enunciate magic spells in order, say, to dispel disease or acquire a perfect memory. ‘Whereas the rabbinic school toils with the Torah “with exertion and great vexation”, the Merkavah mystic, with the help of magic aids, possesses it in a single act of perception’.<sup>28</sup> The Prince of the Countenance or Prince of the Presence, *Sar ha-Panim*, Metatron, was the primary agent in harnessing magical power. The Babylonian Talmud contains three references to him, in Sanhedrin 38, Hagigah 15a and Avodah Zarah 3b. Metatron is a chosen angel of God, and glory and radiance emanate from his countenance.



All the mysteries of the upper world and the lower world are revealed to him, as he is endowed with reason, knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Metatron himself, in Enoch III, states that because of the ‘great love and mercy which the Holy One, blessed be he, loved and adored me more than all the children of heavens, He wrote with his finger, with a flaming style, upon the crown on my head the letters by which the heavens and earth were created’.<sup>29</sup> The adjuration of Metatron in *Merkavah Rabbah* reads:

I adjure you, Metatron, servant [of our creator], whose name is like that of his master’s, that you bind yourself unto me, in order to effect my desire, so that my countenance will shine, my stature will delight me, all beings will be filled with fear of me, my good name will circulate in all of Israel’s places, my dreams will be pleasant to me, my Torah will be kept within me and no word from my mouth and from my heart will be forgotten from this day [and in the future].

(Schäfer 1992: 107)

The dominant names of God used are *Tutrosyay* – literally, four multiplied by *yod-yod*, the two letters of the Hebrew alphabet which signify *Adonai*, the Lord – and *Zohariel* – the splendorous God. In Tractate *Qiddushin* 71a, the Gemara discussed the Name of twelve letters and the Name of forty-two letters. This forty-two letter name was utilized on amulets and also on magic bowls:

The name is written in three units of fourteen letters each. The units are composed of seven repetitions of the name YH. . . . Undoubtedly the magicians knew of the existence of this name and of the great powers attributed to it by the rabbis. They therefore formulated their own theories of its identity.

(Schiffman 1973: 101)

Because the names of the angels and of God contain such magic and power, not only are they described as being utilized, they also appear in prayer format as a key to the mysteries of God’s realm. ‘Every scholar who learns the great mystery . . . who repeats this great mystery, should learn this Mishnah every day after his prayer. He should say it in purity at home or in the synagogue’.<sup>30</sup>

### **The ‘physical’ appearance of God and the angels**

The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem resulted in the disappearance of God’s unlit residence in the Qodesh Qodashim, and He assumed His majestic role in a celestial kingdom, more powerful than any other ruler, earthly or heavenly. The *Hekhal* of the Temple was transformed into the seven *Hekhalot* which fill the huge space in heaven. The perception of God is altered – not only did He change His cloud-like formlessness, but His anthropomorphic nature emerged more fully.

God wears a *haluq*, a shirt-like robe upon which is engraved the tetragram YHWH, inside and out. No one can look at this garment without injury; no creature of flesh and blood can behold it, 'but one who does observe . . . his eyeballs are seized and contorted, and his eyeballs flash and shoot forth torches of fire'. The tradition of *Shiur Qomah*, the measurement of God's body, is found in *Merkavah Rabbah*. Metatron or *Sar ha-Panim* divulges these dimensions. Metatron himself wears a radiant garment of light and a crown with forty-nine ( $7 \times 7$ ) precious stones. He sheds light into all four corners of the earth and throughout the seven heavens.

Metatron describes God, beginning with the soles of his feet, moving across his thighs, shoulders and neck to the head, where hair, forehead, eyebrows, eyes and ears, tongue, lips and nose are described, and the description progresses across the shoulders once more, to the arms, palms, fingers and toes. These details are interspersed with many repetitions of the four letters of God's name, the tetragrammaton. Each measurement is quite inconceivable in its immense size, for example, 'the height of his neck is 130,000,000 parasangs' and 'the entire universe is hung on [God's arm] like an amulet'<sup>31</sup>. Yet God remains accessible to man through the use of his names. The dangers of looking at God appear to be allayed by the enunciation of his name in the formulaic texts of *Hekhalot* literature.

Not only is it extremely dangerous to see God's form, but the cohorts of angels that always protect him in the seventh heaven are themselves described in *Hekhalot Rabbati* as a considerable, intimidating and ghastly force, for they

stand and rage all heroes, lordly, powerful and hard, frightening and terrible, who are higher than mountains . . . Their bows are strung . . . the swords lie sharpened in their hands. Bolts of lightning shoot forth from their eyeballs, canals of fire from their noses and torches of coal from their mouths. They are adorned with helmets and coats of mail, lances and spears hang on their arms . . . And a cloud is there over their heads, which drips blood over their heads and [the heads] of their horses.

(Schäfer 1992: 33)

The phenomenon of actually seeing God's face is described as follows: 'Comely face, glorious face, face of beauty, face of flames. These are the faces of YHWH, God of Israel, when He sits on the throne of His glory . . . The one who looks at Him is immediately torn asunder'.<sup>32</sup>

Despite these dangers, the knowledge, or *gnosis*, of God's measurements, his divine names and the possession of magical seals, provide great benefits:

Happy is the man who knows it and is careful in its regard, for he merits to inherit eternal life in the world to come. R Ishmael said: He who recites this secret shall have a glowing face and an attractive body

and his fear shall be cast upon his fellow men and his good name shall be known among all Israel; his dreams shall be peaceful and his Torah shall be stored up in his hand, (such that) he never forget (any) words of the Torah for all of his days. It is good for him in this world and peaceful for him in the world to come. The evil inclination holds no sway over him and he is safe from spirits, demons, damagers and robbers, from evil animals, snakes, scorpions and imps. . . . I and R Aqiba, once we learned the dimensions of our creator, (found that it was) good for us in this world and peaceful for us (when we contemplated our future in) the world to come.

(Deutsch 1995: 148)

### The purpose of the texts

God reigns as king in the celestial kingdom and his angelic cohorts provide him with crowns by means of their constant paeans to his holy glory. The Rabbis, entwining these prayers with ideas of the lost Temple sacrifices, transformed the heavenly liturgy into the earthly prayer rituals.<sup>33</sup> Another, somewhat unexpected, transformation took place when the holy formulae of ritualized prayer were utilized in magic spells that are secular, but dependent on the aura of holiness inherent in the wording of the prayers. Shaked's article "[*Shalom l'chon, Malachei M'roma*] – Peace be Upon You, Exalted Angels": On Hekhalot, Liturgy and Incantation Bowls' brings together these disparate elements, namely the celestial, the liturgical and the magical, with an illustration of how several sacred verses express three levels of meaning.<sup>34</sup> Linking the elements is the holiness of God in his kingdom, the power achieved by holiness, and how that potency can be transferred, with the knowledge conferred by magical formulae, to other realms of human activity.

The national catastrophe of the destruction of the Temple set in motion a desire to re-situate God. Prayer and sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem were transformed into prayer services that contained references to the sacrificial rites. The *Tanakh* progresses through the 'history' of the Israelites, moving from the patriarchs and matriarchs to the sojourn in Egypt and the exodus of the twelve tribes to the land of Canaan, God's own land which he owns in perpetuity. The various warring states surrounding the kingdoms of Israel and Judah provide the background for chapters of violence and unrest, culminating in the destruction of the first Temple and the exile to Babylon. Prophetic warnings and admonitions fill the books of prophets, while the writings contained in the psalms and the various books of wisdom literature give guidance and instruction in the correct way to live in the world filled with the wonders of nature that God created, an early pre-Talmudic form of *Halakhah*.

The *Hekhalot* literature, in contrast, has no agenda as a general, populist manual of discipline. The Rabbis relate to God in Heaven in a very different way to that in which, say, the psalmist David, hiding from King Saul, or Jonah

in the belly of the whale, relate to their God. What was of utmost importance to rabbinic students was the ability not only to learn all relevant texts, but (even more important), to *remember* them in order to be able to pass on the information or, in the case of execution of rabbinic law, to render judgement in important legal cases.

The attribute most aspired to by a student was 'wisdom'. This quality, *chokhma*, was granted only to a select few. Importantly, those concerned primarily with the place of worship, initially the tabernacle in the wilderness and then the Temple in Jerusalem, were said to embody the quality. Bezalel ben Uri ben Hur was singled out by name and endowed with a 'divine spirit of wisdom and understanding in every kind of craft'.<sup>35</sup> Bezalel was involved in the intricate work in gold, silver, brass, stone and wood, as well as woven material, which was required for the tabernacle, and trained others in his skills. It was widely acknowledged that Solomon, the wise king who built the Temple, had 'the wisdom of God in him, to do justice'.<sup>36</sup> 'Wisdom' has its own paean in the book of Proverbs, where 'she' encompasses the qualities of understanding, nobility, truth, uprightness, justice, prudence, foresight, resourcefulness and courage; 'for wisdom is more precious than rubies; all of your goods cannot equal her'.<sup>37</sup> The reader of Proverbs is encouraged to make his ear attend to wisdom and incline his heart to understanding or discernment. The 'ear' is the channel through which wisdom pours, while the 'heart', the seat of the intellect, enables the wisdom to be absorbed and utilized. The antiquity of Wisdom is described, linking 'her' with God's creative powers as he embarked upon his creation of heaven and earth – 'The Lord created me at the beginning of His course as the first of His works of old. In the distant past I was fashioned, at the beginning, at the origin of earth'.<sup>38</sup> Here lies the kernel of the desire for wisdom; all the secrets of heaven and earth are revealed to the one who attains wisdom and the understanding of God's mysterious ways.

The rabbinic scholar aspired to an intimate knowledge of God, his heavenly kingdom, his angelic cohorts, and ultimately, the great power that could be unleashed by knowing all these things. The shift in style from the study of *Tanakh* to the contemplative speculations of the Talmudic period marked a change in the philosophical approach to the Godhead. Lewis has observed that 'knowledge of God is knowledge of his Law, rather than knowledge of him in himself'.<sup>39</sup> This observation applies to the period of law-making; once the laws are in place, the quest for insights into God and his kingdom becomes a driving force. In the same way that the austerity of Torah literature contrasts with the florid excesses of *Merkavah* and *Hekhalot* texts, so the differing mindsets that produced both these literary forms are exemplified by using the following trope: a steady mainstream of traditional belief flowing from the Tanakh reflects the zealous *El Shaddai*, while the divergences apparent in *Halakhic*, *Midrashic*, *Aggadic* and *Hekhalot* literature represent tributaries of alternative streams of thought deriving from, yet also flowing away from, the mainstream, reflecting the possibilities of access to the Holy King, *Melekh ha-Qadosh*.

An accusation of Dualism has been levelled at the *Hekhalot* literature, because in its fullest meaning it could be seen as propounding a theory that God is both creator and king. The apostasy of Elisha ben Abuya from orthodox Pharisaic Judaism to Gnosticism strengthens Scholem's argument that Gnosticism was a Jewish, not a Christian, heresy. Ben Abuya, a respected *Tanna* (or Sage) of the period before 200 CE, became known as *Aher* – 'the other' – when he 'rejected the yoke of Torah'.<sup>40</sup> The accusation of gnostic dualism rests on a perception of the creation myth of the Torah as evidence for a forbidding, lower, evil demiurge, while the true, benevolent God revealed himself as spiritually transcendent. In the *miqra*, or early Israelite religious texts, God is zealous and austere, *El Qana*, a jealous God. He is the creator of all, and his power encompasses every detail of his creation. Gnostic dualism appears in the texts of the Talmudic and post-second-Temple era of early Judaism. The tales of Enoch's transformation into Metatron, the *Sar ha-Panim* who stands at God's side, and the fallen angel Samael's transformation into Ashmodai, or Satan, who opposes God and accuses mankind, also lend an element of dualism to the *Hekhalot* literature.

### Discussion

Rabbinic authority decreed that because the age of legitimate prophets and the gift of prophecy itself had ended, the canon of *Tanakh* was closed.<sup>41</sup> That decision brought about not only the deliberate exclusion of apocryphal material, but also the coincidental exclusion from the public domain of two other important contemporary categories of writing – the specific cultic texts of the Qumran community and the *Hekhalot* series of texts. But these texts are important because they allow us to see a world picture that has been almost deliberately concealed by the Rabbis.

The gnostic traits that certainly do pervade these texts reveal a philosophic change within the rabbinic perception of Israelite religion and the God who should be worshipped. The self-justifying myths that support several Israelite rituals can be viewed as a series of ideological co-ordinates mediating through a continuum delineating the passage of time. Ideologies concerning philosophical notions of cosmogony and cosmology depict the locale of the deity in a general scheme graphically expressed in ritual and myth. The *Hekhalot* and *Merkavah* texts, however, demonstrate at least three elements: alternative thoughts on the generally accepted monotheistic philosophy; variations on the creation-myth; and a shift in *Weltanschauung*, reflected in the literature produced by the Talmudic sages who lived in both Palestine and Babylonia.

Several reasons for this efflorescence of elaborate speculations on the nature of God have been put forward by modern analysts. No-one knows the true source of inspiration, so it is difficult to give more than a brief overview based on the opinions of major scholars.

Scholem and Elior are the main protagonists for a categorization under the rubric of 'mysticism' when they write persuasively of *Himmelsreise der Seele*.

Deutsch highlights the fact that the *Merkavah* texts, unlike gnostic texts, demonstrate the benefits available both in this world and the next; he emphasizes that the Rabbis ‘did not valorize knowledge as a means of escaping the world, for they did not view the physical cosmos as an inherently negative place’.<sup>42</sup> This opinion reinforces my emphasis on rabbinic pragmatism. Wolfson stresses the anthropomorphism in the texts – God is hidden from view to humanity simply *because* He is, indeed, visible.<sup>43</sup> God’s nature as *qadosh* is accentuated because he is both hidden and discernible, but separated from the natural, mortal world. Gruenwald’s analysis delineates, in more structural fashion, the nature of the vision of God and exactly how the descriptions give a full representation of His realm.<sup>44</sup> Halperin extends the notion of mere description to the notion of ‘knowing’; knowing exactly what happens at the supernatural level when the throne of glory is approached, and also what will happen in the natural world of humanity.<sup>45</sup> Alexander elaborates this more fully, arguing that the secret knowledge available to the adept covered several fields, namely the celestial world, the natural world, the hidden meanings within Torah and, using theurgic magic particularly, the ability to see into the future.<sup>46</sup> Essentially, though, these scholars provide purely literary analyses of the texts that they study, without providing the sort of deep descriptive analyses commonly found in anthropological syntheses and analyses.

Schäfer, Lesses and Swartz treat the texts in a more pragmatic manner. They all regard the purpose of the speculation as paths towards manipulative magic. Lesses has written on the power of the magic word, Swartz associates the magic with piety, while Schäfer links the use of language not only with the perception of God, but also with the dangerous magic involved in that perception of a God who is both ‘hidden’ and ‘manifest’. Schäfer criticizes Scholem’s classification of the genre as esoteric ‘mysticism’, and instead proposes a ‘radical transformation’ of normative Judaism at the hands of the authors of the texts.<sup>47</sup> Schäfer does not, however, give an indication of why he thinks a definition of ‘magic’ should be more acceptable as a characterization of these enigmatic texts than is a definition of ‘mysticism’.

‘Magic’, in its role as a *doppelganger* of ‘science’, was used as a product of knowledge and wisdom, and functioned merely as an instrument utilized in the interests of furthering knowledge and power on earth. An interaction with God, who was perceived as the only source of true knowledge and power, allowed the adept to encounter and utilize the authority of the numinous. As Scholem puts it: ‘What moved these mystics was not the spirituality of His being, but the majesty of His theophany’.<sup>48</sup> The Children of Israel, constantly aspiring not only to draw near to and actually *be* like God in holiness and purity as a legitimate goal, were now, by emulating the Sages in their aspirations to approach and see God, also given legitimation to appropriate God’s all-encompassing wisdom. They thus gained empowerment with which to harness the supernatural forces previously forbidden to them. The *sorties* made by the Sages into the world of celestial forces now enabled a society that had always been warned against the world of ‘the augur, the soothsayer, the diviner, the sorcerer, the magician’<sup>49</sup>, to access and acquire other ways of dealing with misfortune.



Figure 6 Ivory inlay: Cherub or winged sphinx, Phoenician style, Arslan Tash, Syria, c. 850–800 BCE (Courtesy of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem) (photo credit: David Harris).



Figure 7 Cylinder seal: *Ladders to Heaven*: gods building a tower. Mesopotamia c. 2246–2160 BCE (courtesy of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem) (photo credit: Dietrich Widmer).



## IMPRECATIONS, HEALING AND PROTECTION

### The 'Book of Secrets', amulets, incantation bowls

In this chapter, the belief and practices of pre-Talmudic and Talmudic Judaism will be compared and contrasted with several counterparts in the texts and magical praxes of Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Persia. Demonstrating the influence of the symbolism and constructs of Jewish religious texts on magical incantations, these ideas moved from one culture-area to another over a period of around seven hundred years. In addition, this illustrates the potency of Jewish notions of the cosmos as revealed in the Hebrew language and the letters of its alphabet.

The writing of Jewish magical spells and incantations utilized core aspects of the orthodox ancient Hebrew sacrificial cult and its prayer rituals. Talmudic descriptions of these sacred ceremonies were included in the development of standard Jewish prayer formulae, and variants of these were commonly used not only in Jewish magic, but also in Egyptian and Hellenistic magic. A combination of intuitive and esoteric rabbinic traditions were transformed and expressed in the magical prayer-formulae inscribed on Babylonian incantation bowls, amulets from Palestine, and magical texts from the Cairo Genizah. Some examples will show the influence of the Babylonian tradition on early Jewish texts. The Palestinian metal amulets and the incantation bowls from Babylonia are original texts that date, in the main, from the same period as The Book of Secrets, *Sefer ha-Razim*, around the third or fourth centuries of the present era.

The Jewish magical formulae utilized in Palestine were, according to Naveh and Shaked, borrowed by the Babylonians and used extensively for inscriptions on incantation bowls. *Hekhalot* literature also exerted its influence on secular magical texts. Scriptural verses that appeared in the formal written prayers of Early Judaism found their way into spell-writing, and prayers for health and well-being had their spell-equivalents in the texts of incantation bowls and amulets. The magic spells and incantations that refer to characteristics of the Temple service, or to prayer formulae used in communal religious rituals, or to powerful agents who are part of the orthodox, traditional panoply of angels, prophets, kings and priests, gain their efficacy from the innate power invested in specific words and names.

The destruction by the Babylonians of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem in



586 BCE meant that performance of the central religious rite of Ancient Judaism, animal sacrifice to God on the Temple mount in Jerusalem, could no longer take place. During the Second Temple period, the sacrificial cult was reinstated, but the subsequent destruction by the Romans of the Second Temple in CE 70 brought about an end to sacrificial services. During the Second Temple period, a group called *hasidim rishonim*, early pious men, had used prayer formulae in worship, in addition to the sacrifices. So a comprehensive system of communal statutory prayer was gradually formulated by the Rabbis and took the place of the daily sacrifices. Extracts from these prayers, together with scriptural and Talmudic passages, were widely used on Jewish magic incantation bowls and amulets in order to appeal to God in instances of misfortune or to ensure the continuation of well-being. Thus public prayer was appropriated for personal use.

A theme that pervades the texts is the requirement for the High Priest to maintain ritual purity, a physical state deemed necessary in order to serve in the Temple and to pronounce the ineffable name of God aloud, which in turn prompted the congregational response ‘Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever’. Lesses, quoting from the Book of Enoch, shows the connection between this Book, which is part of the *Hekhalot* corpus, and the traditional Temple cult:

When the ministering angels utter the ‘Holy’ [*Qadosh*], all of the Explicit Names (*shemot ha-meforashot*) which are engraved with a flaming pen on the Throne of Glory, fly like eagles with sixteen wings, and surround . . . the Holy One . . . The other orders of the angels fall on their faces three times and say, ‘*Blessed is the Name of his glorious kingdom for ever and ever*’.

(Lesses 1995: 201, 203)

Lesses illustrates the innate power of God’s Name, quoting this extract: ‘He is His Name, and His Name is He, He is in Him and His Name is in His Name, song is His Name and His Name is Song’.<sup>1</sup> She also points out that the decree of Ezra ‘equates the Temple service, which the priests had to perform in a state of purity, with the reading of Torah and prayer’.<sup>2</sup> So the importance of ritual purity is extended from the priest as Temple officiant of holy sacrifice, to the post-exilic congregational leader, as officiant of prayer services.

The earthly Temple service of the priests was a structural transformation of the Celestial Temple service described in *Hekhalot* texts, in which angels sing the praise of God. The Temple service was performed by priests, *Kohanim*, who were Levites. Moses and Aaron were Levites, Aaron being the first Levitical High Priest. Moses was the one to whom God made himself known as ‘YHWH’, *Adonai*, the ineffable, and to whom God spoke ‘mouth to mouth’, for Moses had seen ‘the likeness of the Lord’.<sup>3</sup> Any mention of Moses, Aaron, King David and King Solomon, or other influential scriptural figure would reinforce a cultural

assumption: the particular reference would signify that the power of God, given to his elect or royal earthly representatives, could, in the same way, be used by the spell-binder using angelic names in order to harness the power of angels who are close to God. Salient verses used in magical texts were taken from the Book of Leviticus, where purificative rites that rid men and women of the ritual impurity brought on by seminal and menstrual emissions are described. These purification rites were used to enable people to approach holy places or eat holy food. For priests, the pollution of a seminal emission was a real peril, and during Talmudic times it was believed that the pollution of a nocturnal emission was caused by a female demon, Lilith, who visited men at night.

Elior has highlighted the debt of the *Hekhalot* literature to the biblical Book of Ezekiel and to the later, Talmudic *Merkavah* tradition. The term *Hekhalot*, or Heavenly Halls, ‘recalls the *hekhal*, the central part of the Temple (generally translated as “sanctuary” or “shrine”), accessible exclusively to the priests and Levites, who performed the sacred service there; and *Merkavah*, “chariot”, alludes to the *devir* or Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum of the Temple, which the High Priest alone was permitted to enter’.<sup>4</sup> Elior writes that

there is no doubt that *Hekhalot* literature is replete with direct and indirect allusions to the world of the priests and the Levites in the Temple. Its liturgical sections bear the clear imprint of the priestly and Levitical service; its language is strongly influenced by certain aspects of the sacred service and by literary traditions of the Temple rites.

(Elior 1997: 224)

The heavenly service is performed by the *Keruvim* (Cherubim), *Ofannim*, and Holy *Hayyot* and

the sublime tone of the liturgy and its ceremonies expresses the remoteness of the heavens, as well as surrender to the supremacy and kingship of God. The numinous proceedings culminate in the sanctification of . . . the ineffable Name, and the benediction ‘*Blessed be His Name, Whose glorious Kingdom is for ever and ever*’ – all rites once performed in the Temple.

(Elior 1997: 259)

Levene quotes Joseph Dan on the shared traditions of mysticism and magic in *Hekhalot* literature: ‘the knowledge of secrets is power, and knowledge of secrets of the upper world grants the individual with that knowledge power and influence . . .’. Significantly, Levene asserts that ‘the magic bowls constitute the practical counterpart to . . . texts which are all of a prescriptive nature, they are the only material evidence for magical practices that are implied in the *Hekhalot* texts’.<sup>5</sup>

Magical incantations usually involved four ‘entities’ or actors: a particular

patient or a household in general; a demonic force to be repelled and controlled; angelic forces marshalled in order to repel and control; and God himself, the originator of all things both good and bad in the world. The angelic and demonic forces involved in magical incantations represent a contrast to the sacred ritual and public roles played out by priests and worshippers in ceremonies of sacrifice and prayer to God. The set-formula of a magical incantation was typified by a 'victim' who had been 'seized' by evil spirits and as a result suffered from a physical or social malady; or the person feared seizure by a demonic force and the inevitable ensuing misfortune. The spell-writer could call upon the angels of God or indeed God himself, for assistance in escaping from or avoiding the maleficence. Incantations were written in several styles and languages, and, judging by variations in orthography, were executed in some instances by spell-writers of great skill who were probably rabbis, or sometimes by scribes of dubious character who had somehow gained access to the magical spells and esoteric formulae.

The Greek Magical Papyri, used during the Ptolemaic and Roman period in Egypt, around 150 BCE to CE 200, contain ideas and formulae that show the influence of Jewish magic. Part of a text from a Greek papyrus mentions 'Moses the Prophet, to whom thou didst commit thy mysteries, the ceremonies of Israel', and a magical formula calls upon 'god of gods, the lord of spirits, the immoveable Aeon, IAOUUEI [YAWEH] . . . Iao, Ieo, Nebouth, Sabiothar, Both, Arbathiao, Iaoth, Sabaoth, [(lord of) hosts], Patoure [open?], Zagoure [closed?], Baroukh Adonai [blessed is the Lord], Eloai Iabraam [God of Abraham], Barbrauo' etc. This spell ends with the assurance that it 'loosens chains, binds, brings dreams, creates favour; it may be used in common for whatever purpose you will'.<sup>6</sup>

The rites of ancient Coptic magic have several features in common with Jewish Talmudic medical remedies and Jewish magic:

Ritual instructions pervade these texts. Stand over here, hold a pebble, tie seven threads in seven knots, say the names seven times, draw the figure in the bottom of the cup, write the spell with the finger of a mummy, write it with bat's blood, with menstrual blood, on papyrus, on clay, on lead, on tin, on a rib bone, on a parchment shaped like a sword, fold it, burn it, tie it to your arm, your thumb, drive a nail in it, bury it with a mummy, bury it under someone's doorstep, mix this recipe, drink it. Or simply 'do the usual'.

(Meyer and Smith 1994: 4)

In the Egyptian magical tradition, where magical formulae were inscribed on gold leaf, hollow statues were made and consecrated so that 'with the help of herbs, gems and odours, the souls of daemons or of angels' could be imprisoned. The magical papyri

offer recipes for constructing such images and animating them . . . the image is to be hollow . . . and is to *enclose* a magic name inscribed on gold leaf; a hollow Hermes enclosing a magic formula, consecrated by a garland and the sacrifice of a cock.

(Dodds 1973: 293)

Levene has noted that a white cock is mentioned in a cursing ritual on an incantation bowl.<sup>7</sup>

Jewish incantation bowls served a similar purpose in ‘enclosing’ a formula that would likewise imprison or enclose a demon. The cognitive significance of the confined area of a bowl or amulet is comparable to Mauss’s observation that ‘the magician may draw a magical circle or square, a *templum*, around him and he performs his magic inside this’. Levene notes that even within the bowl’s own physical limits, ‘it is very common for the whole text to be surrounded by a circle’.<sup>8</sup> In the same tradition, the ascetic Talmudic miracle-worker, Choni *hame’agel*, Choni the Circle-drawer, would draw a circle around himself before praying for rain. This was perceived as a magical act, but Choni was a righteous man, and was told by one of the early Sages, the *Tanna* Shimon ben Shetach, that ‘If you were not Choni, whom God loves like a son, I would excommunicate you’.<sup>9</sup>

### Origins of magical incantations

The Babylonian tradition of healing featured two distinct practitioners. The incantation-priest, the *ashipu*, whose role was both religious and magical, dealt with the world of the demonic. He was an exorcist who performed a ritual that delivered the sufferer from an affliction of a spiritual nature. The healer, the *asu*, whose role was pragmatic, dealt with potions and prescriptions. Detailed recipes and instructions on concocting these potions are given on cuneiform tablets.

In order to illustrate how closely the traditions of Temple service, priestly actions, prayer, celestial ascents and magical praxis are intertwined, several pivotal texts have been selected for discussion. In the Talmud, instructions are given for the correct enunciation of an incantation. The repetition would increase the potency of the words: ‘Directions must be meticulously observed; ‘incantations which are not repeated the prescribed number of times must be said forty-one times’, we read in the Talmud [*Shabbat* 61b].<sup>10</sup>

The tradition of meticulously observing directions, as in a medical recipe or a magical rite, and the convention of using many repetitive actions or words, are found both in the sacrificial rites of Temple service and in the ritual of the liturgy. The Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, is the holiest day of the year, and a description of the High Priest’s role in the sacrificial ceremony in the Temple on that day is given in the Talmud. The importance of the repetitive nature of the ceremony and also the part which ritual purity, fasting and immersion played in ensuring that the rites were correctly observed, is emphasized.

It has been argued that the phrase ‘blessed be the name of his glorious kingdom for ever and ever’, routinely recited in undertone in everyday prayer, was included in the liturgy simply *because* it was commonly perceived as efficacious in incantation formulae.<sup>11</sup> The phrase was the congregational response to the High Priest’s annual enunciation of the holy name of God, the Tetragrammaton, during the service of the Day of Atonement, when it was repeated ten times, or, according to another source, thirteen times. Each time the ‘Name’ was uttered, the people prostrated themselves as they repeated the phrase.<sup>12</sup> The entire performance of the ceremony may be interpreted as a ‘magical’ repetition of the holy name, with attendant symbolic rites. Each year the High Priest would rehearse his part in the performance of this complex ceremony so as not to omit any component, thus ensuring that he and the congregation could atone for sin and attain a state of purity.

The cuneiform magical ‘Burning’ texts, the Babylonian *Maqlû* series of rituals and incantations, date from around the first millennium and illustrate ‘the emergence of a full-blown conception of the witch as a demonic force operating within a structured cosmos’.<sup>13</sup> *Maqlû* texts contain the Akkadian word for witch, *kassapatu*, with the root k-s-f/p, which is related to the Hebrew word for a witch, *mekhashefa*. The *Maqlû* spells were ‘recited against hostile magicians who . . . practised their arts against the suppliant, who appeals for divine aid’.<sup>14</sup>

The texts of the Babylonian *Maqlû* ritual demonstrate how the priest-exorcist removed the influence of a witch from a patient. A series of cuneiform tablets was used to inscribe and describe this ‘single complex ceremony’, and has been identified as a specific *Maqlû* ritual of August 670 BCE. I shall not quote directly from this very long and drawn-out ceremony. Suffice to say that the extensive texts that delineate the judgement, execution and expulsion of the witch depict how the gods were invoked, how representations of the witch were burnt, while the patient, thought to have been King Esarhaddon, was anointed and repeatedly washed, and how finally, ‘representations of the witch in edible form (were) thrown to dogs’.<sup>15</sup> So we see a five-part ritual comprising (1) Prayer, (2) Ceremonial Burnings, (3) Anointing and Washing, (4) Symbolic ‘throwing away’ of an offensive object and (5) Exorcism of a malevolent influence.

The *Maqlû* text here used as exemplar was written in cuneiform script in the Akkadian language, and describes the winning wiles of the witch in a way that is clearly a model for the depiction of the seductive powers of the harlot in the Book of Proverbs. I would argue, however, that the Akkadian influences, both linguistic and stylistic, are not the only factors that may have influenced Jewish praxis. I suggest that the Temple ceremony of Yom Kippur was also influenced by the Babylonian tradition described in the text. The Babylonian text shows how the maleficence of a witch could be controlled by means of an exorcism ritual, performed by the *ashipu*, the incantation priest, much as the exorcism of personal and communal sin was controlled by the High Priest in the Temple on Yom Kippur. A brief extract indicates the general tone of the *Maqlû* ritual:

The witch that roameth the streets  
 Entering houses, prowling through towns,  
 Going through the broad places, walking up and down,  
 She standeth in the street and turneth her feet  
 Through the broad place she hindereth passage  
 Of the well-favoured man  
 She snatcheth away the love  
 Of the well-favoured maid  
 She stealeth away the fruit  
 By her glance she taketh away her desire.  
 . . . O witch I seize thy mouth, I seize thy tongue  
 I seize thine eyes as they glance  
 I seize thy feet as they walk  
 I seize thy knees as they bend  
 I seize thy hands as they twist  
 I bind thy hands behind thee.  
 May the magic which she hath worked be crumbled like  
 salt; Her knot is loosed, her work is destroyed.

(Campbell Thompson 1908: xxv–xxvii)

To show the influence of the *Maqlû* text genre on later Aramaic and Hebrew writing in both style and content I quote, firstly, the following extract from the scriptural Book of Proverbs, which describes the wayward and destructive nature of the uncontrollable harlot. An innocent youth is ensnared by the harlot, and the encounter is fraught with the dangers of the netherworld:

A woman comes towards him dressed like a harlot, with set purpose. She is bustling and restive; she is never at home. Now in the street, now in the square, she lurks at every corner. She lays hold of him and kisses him. . . . Thoughtlessly he follows her, like an ox going to the slaughter . . . He is like a bird rushing into a trap . . . For many are those she has struck dead . . . Her house is a highway to Sheol leading down to Death's inner chambers.

(Proverbs 7: 7ff.)

As the witch is demonized in the Babylonian model, so the harlot comes to embody the potential destruction and death of the demonic. The imagery of exorcism ('seizing', 'binding') used in the magical *Maqlû* text of Early Antiquity is closely related to that used in the texts of Babylonian Aramaic incantation bowls of Late Antiquity, and is also echoed in the magic of the Egyptian-Hellenistic period.

Returning to the thematic link between Babylonian and ancient Hebrew ideas of sin and sacrifice, and taking up the thread of exorcism as described in the *Maqlû* ritual, I return to the description of Yom Kippur ceremonies. Before the

Temple ceremony the priest was forced to stay awake to avoid an accidental 'happening', *qeri*, a nocturnal emission. In other words, a *Lilith* demon could not overcome him while he remained awake. The repetitive immersions of the High Priest and his enunciations of God's name, the sacrifice of beasts, the immolation of flesh, the anointing of the altar with blood, and the goat thrown over the precipice, make up a ritual as complicated as the *Maqlû* rite. The following is a paraphrase from Mishna *Yoma*:<sup>16</sup>

Seven days before Yom Kippur the high priest was taken from his home to an apartment in the Temple, where he practised his service for the Day of Atonement. Another priest was made ready to take his place if anything happened to defile and disqualify him. . . . Throughout the seven days he was allowed to eat and drink; but on the day preceding Yom Kippur toward sunset, he was not permitted to eat much, because food induces sleep. The elders of the priesthood adjured him: 'Lord High Priest, we adjure you by the name of God to change nothing of what we have instructed you.' . . . If he was falling asleep, the young priests would snap their middle fingers and say: 'Lord High Priest, stand up and drive sleep away by walking on the cold pavement.' They used to divert him until the time of the daily morning offering. He would then be taken to the place of immersion, since no one was permitted to officiate in the Temple before he had bathed, even if he was clean. On this day the high priest would bathe five times. Standing in the east and facing the west, he set his hands upon his own sin-offering and made confession [and said the ineffable Name of God out loud] . . . When the priests and the people, who were standing in the Temple court heard God's glorious and revered name clearly expressed by the high priest with holiness and purity, they fell on their knees, prostrated themselves and worshipped; they fell upon their faces and responded: *Blessed be the name of his glorious majesty for ever and ever.*

[This ceremony was repeated three times during the service.]

Then he went to the east side of the Temple court, where a pair of goats, equal in form and height, were standing ready to be used as an atonement for the iniquity of a wayward community. He shook the casket and drew two lots, one for God and one for *Azazel* . . . He tied a crimson thread on the head of the scapegoat, and placed the animal in the direction where it was to be sent away. . . .

Then the high priest entered the most holy place with an offering of fragrant incense after having slaughtered his own bullock. Then he sprinkled its blood once upward and seven times downward. This is the way he counted: one; one and one; one and two; one and three (etc.). He came out and slaughtered the goat; he sprinkled its blood once



upward and seven times downward, counting as before . . . Then he mixed the blood of the two offerings [and with this] he cleansed the gilded altar, seven (times) on its purity and four (times) on its horns.<sup>17</sup> . . . The high priest sent the scapegoat away to the desert . . . it was to bear away the stains of Israel's iniquities into the wilderness.

The high priest then bathed a third time, changed into golden garments, performed more sacrifices using rams, bathed a fourth time, changed into linen garments, entered the holy of holies, took off the linen garments, bathed a fifth time, put on the golden garments, sacrificed the daily offering, burned incense, lighted lamps, washed his hands and feet, after which 'he was elated, his face beaming with sun-like radiance, when he put on his own clothes'.<sup>18</sup>

This echoes the five-part ceremonial as in the *Maqlû* rite; indeed, the common themes, symbols, and symbolic actions that feature in the given example of *Maqlû* magic, and the Atonement religious ceremonies and incantations, illustrate how difficult it is to distinguish between 'true' religion and 'true' magic.

The selection of amulet, incantation bowl and magical texts that follows below uses the potent names of the many angels found in Jewish angelology, as well as the names of demons found in Talmudic and other texts. The combinations of letters that make up powerful formulae are in evidence, while the texts carry references to significant personalities of the scriptures and hint at the performance of sacred rituals. The Talmudic convention of naming the mother of the patient/s is also illustrated, as are the prayer-like 'concluding' conventions such as 'amen' and 'selah'.

### Genizah texts

Documents found during the late nineteenth century in a secret storeroom in the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo are known as *Genizah*, or hidden, writings, and represent a cache of manuscripts dating from the seventh to the seventeenth century CE. Because the letters of the Hebrew alphabet were perceived as sacred, and documents that contained prayers or bore the name of God naturally fell into this category, all manner of writings were stored in the secret room. The contents of the *Genizah* withstood the ravages of ten centuries or more in their secret archive because of the arid Egyptian climate. Most *Genizah* documents of Late Antiquity are written on paper and date from around the ninth or tenth centuries; others are written on parchment, while one cloth amulet has survived intact. *Genizah* documents often provide full versions of incantation texts found on amulets or bowls that are incomplete because of the fragility of the metal from which they are made, or because of breakages in the earthenware. From the many thousands of fragments of documents and texts, a number have been used by scholars to suggest emendations of several earlier, and sometimes incomplete, magical and other texts. It has been shown that 'important similarities and



literary parallels exist between early Palestinian Jewish magic and the magic of the *Genizah* texts'.<sup>19</sup>

### Sefer Ha-Razim

The Book of Secrets, or *Sefer ha-Razim*, was found in the Cairo *Genizah* and extracts from that text will be used to illustrate my argument. The book contains cosmological ideas of Jewish Hellenistic times, found both in the Talmud and in *Hekhalot* literature. It is dated to the third or early fourth century of the present era. Much of the emphasis lies in the descriptions of the *wisdom* required in order to create the universe. The Book of Secrets is, in addition to the Talmudic writings and the *Hekhalot* literature, a valuable source of material relating to God's celestial kingdom. The seven firmaments are described in detail, portraying the world of angels and angelic princes who serve within the encampments in which the movements of the sun, the months of the year, and the divine throne hold sway. Specific details of theurgic praxes are given, including invocations for ritual procedures and details of the functions of special angels in their celestial divisions and subdivisions. In special cases, additional remedies are given that will assist, alter or reverse the magic.

The *Sefer ha-Razim* is written in Midrashic Hebrew and is dated to the late third or early fourth century CE. Greek words found in the texts were

technical terms which were used in contemporary magical praxis . . . spells and incantations of *Sefer ha-Razim* closely parallel the magical material preserved in the Greek magical papyri, and in the Aramaic incantation bowls . . . the forms of the adjurations are similar to material known from early Rabbinic literature, the cosmological framework of the text reflects the *Enoch* and *Hekhalot* literature of that period.

(Margalioth 1966: 8)

The magical style of *Sefer ha-Razim* is recognized as

part of a folk tradition which dates from an earlier time. For example, the idol used to quell a rising river . . . is clearly one which the [Talmudic] Rabbis in *Avodah Zarah* 3: 1 forbid Jews to make or possess. Since the Rabbis found it necessary to ban the image, one must assume that it was in popular use prior to the Mishnah's compilation. . . . *Sefer ha-Razim* is a fine example of the syncretistic nature of the Hellenistic world.

(Margalioth 1966: 11)

The book's origins are supposedly derived from the angel Raziel (*raz*: secret, mystery; *el*: God), who was thought to have given the secrets of the universe to Noah, who in turn inscribed this mystical knowledge upon a sapphire stone. The knowledge includes

understanding and thoughts of humility and concepts of counsel . . . the course of the sun . . . the observations of the moon . . . the paths of the Great Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades . . . rituals that cause death and rituals that preserve life, to understand the evil and the good . . . the time to strike and the time to heal, to interpret dreams and visions . . . to rule over spirits and demons, to send them (wherever you wish) so they will go out like slaves . . . to be learned in the speech of thunderclaps, to tell the significance of lightning flashes, to foretell what will happen in each and every month . . . whether for harvest or for drought, whether for peace or for war, to be as one of the awesome ones and to comprehend the songs of heaven.

(Margalioth 1966: 17)

This knowledge and wisdom, including the ability to see into the future, was then given by Noah to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to Levi, Kohath and Joshua, to King Solomon and the prophets, and finally to the elders and sages of the Rabbinic era. The comprehensive nature of this secret knowledge is mirrored in the *Hekhalot* literature, which included the use of specific names, *nomina barbara* and unintelligible formulae for theurgic purposes.

Magical medical remedies are described, for example:

If you wish to perform an act of healing, arise in the first or second hour of the night and take with you myrrh and frankincense. This (is to be) put on burning coals (while saying) the name of the angel who rules over the first encampment . . . and say there, seven times, (the names of the) seventy-two angels who serve before him, and say as follows: *I, N the son of N, beseech you that you will give me success in healing N the son of N.* And anyone for whom you ask, whether in writing or verbally, will be healed. Purify yourself from all impurity and cleanse your flesh from all carnality and then you will succeed.

The second example is a remedy for harming others:

And if you wish to send them [the angels?] against your enemy, or against your creditor, or to capsize a ship, or to fell a fortified wall, or against any business of your enemies, to damage and destroy, whether you desire to exile him, or to make him bedridden, or to blind him or to lame him, or to grieve him in any thing (do as follows): ‘Take water from seven springs on the seventh day of the month, in the seventh hour of the day, in seven unfired pottery vessels and do not mix them with one another.’ The water is to be exposed to the stars for seven nights, and ‘on the seventh night take a glass vial, and (say over it) the name of your adversary, and pour the water (from the seven unfired pottery vessels) into it, then break the pottery vessels and throw the

pieces to the east, north, west, and south, and say thus to the four directions: “angels” who dwell in the east, north, west, south, accept from my hand at this time that which I throw to you, to affect N son of N, to break his bones, to crush all his limbs, and to shatter his conceited power, as these pottery vessels are broken. And may there be no recovery for him, just as there is no recovery for these pottery vessels.’ . . . other spells follow: ‘I adjure you, angels of fury, wrath, and anger, that you will rise up against the ship . . . the wall . . . destroy, overturn’ etc.

A curse of demonic malevolence, yet utilizing angelic power, is provided in the text:

I deliver to you, angels of anger and wrath, N son of N, that you will strangle him and destroy him and his appearance, make him bedridden, diminish his wealth, annul the intentions of his heart, blow away his thought and his knowledge and cause him to waste away continually until he approaches death. . . . Do it in a state of purity and then you will succeed.

*Analysis of the above three ‘Sefer ha-Razim’ texts*

The reference to the priestly sacred service is evident in the ceremony with frankincense and myrrh and burning coals, bringing to mind the incense altar of the Tabernacle and Temple. Reference is made to the ritual purity of the priests, and the significance of the number seven is also highlighted. Water ‘exposed to the stars’ is ordinarily a source of maleficence,<sup>20</sup> so this curse utilizes the malignant quality of water that has absorbed the evil of the night. The repetitions ensure the efficacy of the curse, where broken pottery symbolizes the broken bones and shattered powers of the victim. The last example describes the wish for total dissolution of a person, both mentally and physically, yet despite the malign nature of the curse, the requirement of ritual purity remains necessary for the efficacy of this spell.

### **The manufacture and provenance of amulets and bowls**

The process of writing magical spells on amulets and bowls harks back to the tradition of recording business transactions on tablets made of clay, and completing the documentation with the imprint of a seal. Mesopotamian stamp seals date from between 6000 and 5000 BCE and were used as marks of ownership, or as amulets. They were carved with specific and meaningful designs, usually depicting figures of gods, humans or animals, performing everyday activities such as agricultural, pastoral or religious rites. Cylinder seals dating from around 3500 BCE and onwards were used in Mesopotamia and Iran, and although the traditional ‘stamp’ seals of the binding contract remained current throughout

the ancient Near East, use of the cylinder seal emerged as the preferred method of disseminating religious ideas and visual patterns. Stamp and cylinder seals faded from use for around one thousand years before the neo-Babylonian period, but their popularity was renewed during this period (625–539 BCE) and they were once again used on clay tablets to symbolize authority. When papyrus was introduced in the first millennium BCE, the use of stamp seals became even more widespread, while cylinder seals were used mainly as amulets. One of the scenes most frequently depicted on a cylinder seal was the act of sacrificial worship to a god who was often portrayed symbolically by, say, a moon disk, or the mace used in battle, or the jagged edge of a saw that represented the sun.

The reliability of, and confidence in, a contractual arrangement underpinning the concept of a ‘binding’ document ‘sealed’ with an intent as surety of purpose, shows that people of Early Antiquity had faith in the authority of a written document. Similarly, the Jewish amulets and bowls, excavated from many archaeological sites in Mesopotamia, Palestine and Syria, rely on the authority of magical power that rests primarily in the belief of the omnipotence of God and his angels, who hold the power to bind and seal demonic forces. Incantation bowls and amulets, usually of Jewish origin, were written for clients who may or may not themselves have been Jewish. But the faith that Early Judaism placed in *Words of God* ensured that the efficacy of a magic incantation or spell *in the name of God* was unquestioned. Performative utterances also carried the authority vested in the spoken word, and magical words were used not only for protection from harm or disease, but were also invoked in the form of charms to arouse love, or for inflicting evil upon enemies.

### *Amulets*

Metal amulets from Palestine, Asia Minor and Syria were written in Hebrew, Judaeo-Aramaic and Syriac and were often rolled and placed in narrow containers that echo the shape of the cylinder seal. Used as talismans, they were probably worn as personal ornaments, or also possibly hung on the doorposts of private houses or fixed in public places such as synagogues, particularly at the site of the holy ark where Torah scrolls were kept. Amulets were also written on unbaked clay and their efficacy in awakening the love of the desired was kindled when they were consigned to flames. An example of this interesting variation has been given by Naveh and Shaked, who describe a potsherd inscribed with a love-charm, from Horvat Rimmon, north of Be'er Sheva. ‘The choice of a potsherd in this case was integral to the praxis of the charm. The incantation, written on unbaked clay, was “activated” by the clay being fired’.<sup>21</sup>

Amulets were no doubt prepared according to the amount of money that the client was willing to pay for the work, and the extant amulets, where the inscriptions were incised upon a plain sheet of gold, silver, copper or lead, were obviously more durable than the papyrus, parchment or cloth amulets that were surely also used for magical purposes during that period.



*t q t q t q t q t q t q t q*, 'Uzza'el  
 Notevi'el. May there be driven away the evil  
 spirit, the fever, the tertian (fever), and all  
 evil spirit from the body of  
 Simon, son of Kattia, and from all  
 his limbs. Amen Selah. And in the name of  
 'bhy 'bhy 'bhy 'bhy 'bhy 'bhy 'bhy  
 your name, I adjure  
 and write: You, heal Simon  
 son of Kattia, from the fever  
 which is in him. Amen Amen Selah.  
 I make an oath and adjure in the name of  
*ysr tmnw'l* who sits on  
 the river whence all evil  
 spirits emerge; and in the name of Yequmi'el  
 who sits on the roads;  
 [Na]hariel, who sits over the [light,]  
 Tomie'el, who sits [on . . .]  
 and in the na[me of . . .]

(Naveh and Shaked 1993: 62)

ANALYSIS

The immediate assumption that the amulet writer makes is that this amulet is *tov*, good, or proper, and will be efficacious against several types of fevers, warding off evil glances from the client's limbs and entire body. Words and letters of the names of powerful agents who will defy and conquer the spirit, *ru'ach*, of the fever are varied. *Abrasax* and 'the Name', that is, God's name, as well as variations on 'holy god', written as *s*, *q*, *hq* are adjured (sworn by) in order to dispel the work of the evil spirit, *rucha bishta*, or *ru'ach bisha*. *Abrasax*, frequently invoked in Palestinian charms, is, according to *Sefer ha-Razim*, 'the first among some thirty angels directing the sun during the day'.<sup>22</sup> Following the use of the holy letters and names, the amulet concludes with the formula found in psalms and prayers, 'Amen, Selah' and the oath in the names of mighty angels. The Hebrew word for adjure, or swear on oath, is *hashva'ah*, taken from the symbolically magical root of the number seven, *sheva*. The translators note that 'El El' appears in *Sefer ha-Razim* I: 25 and that 'as a magic expression it corresponds to *yh yh* etc'. They also observe that the angelic name Uzziel appears in *Sefer ha-Razim* I: 195.

*Text II*

[The amulet from Irbid is inscribed silver, 9.5 × 3.5 cm, and is in the New York Public Library.] Translator's note 'the front-plate of Aaron' features on another

amulet in the same volume, while ‘the signet-ring of Solomon’ features on a magic bowl translated by Montgomery.

And by the rod of Moses and by the front-plate of Aaron  
the High Priest and by the signet-ring of Solomon and [ ]  
[ ] of David and by the horns of the altar and by the nam[e]  
[of] the living and existent God: that you should be expelled, (you,  
[the evil]  
[s]pirit and the evil assailant and every evil  
des[troyer] from the body of Marian daughter of [Sarah]  
and her foetus that is in her belly from th[is day]  
to eternity, Amen, Amen, Selah [ ]  
[ ] ‘*nmwn py’nh* [ ]’ (*magic characters*)  
Ba’el Netan’el Beyah Abraham ’gw  
[ ] who resides over [ ]  
expel from Marian and from her foetus all spirit  
[ ] . . . and blocks her gullet. I adjure you,  
spirit, that you should be expelled from Marian and from  
her foetus that is in her belly. By the name of He who rebukes the sea  
“and its  
waves roared YYYYY Sabaoth is His name” (Is. 51:15; Jer.31:35),  
may He rebuke (= expel) from Marian daughter of Sarah  
and from her foetus this evil spirit.  
By the name of the Great God *mn ’lpy ’lkd’y’*  
[g]uard Marian daughter of Sarah  
and her foetus that is inside her belly. By the name of  
[ ]  
Middot, the angels that are appointed over the . . .  
. . . redeem Marian daughter  
of Sarah and her foetus that is in her belly  
from all male and female spirit [ . . . ]

(Naveh and Shaked 1993: 93)

ANALYSIS

Scripture tells of the power God gave to Moses so that, by means of a rod, *mateh* [Aramaic: *chutra*], he could perform miraculous acts, while the front-plate, *tzitz*, of Aaron the High Priest, was of pure gold and engraved with the words *qodesh l’adonai*, holy to God.<sup>23</sup> In the Babylonian Talmud a story is told of King Solomon vying for power with Ashmodai, King of the Demons, and the power contained within Solomon’s signet-ring upon which the Name of God was engraved.<sup>24</sup> The ‘horns of the altar’, *karnei ha-mizbe’ach*, [Aramaic: *karnata d’midbacha*] were perhaps the most significant parts of the altar, for the blood of sacrificial offerings was ordinarily ‘dashed’ or sprinkled upon the altar, and ‘the

omission of a sprinkling invalidated the atonement ceremonial'.<sup>25</sup> However, on Festivals, the New Moon and the Day of Atonement, blood was specifically smeared upon the horns: 'it was requisite to make four sprinklings of that blood, one upon each of the four corners of the altar'.<sup>26</sup> These holy and authoritative agents would, with the addition of 'the Name of the living and existent God', give great power to the spell of the amulet for the crucial protection of a foetus in the body of its mother. Again, the prayer formula 'Amen Selah' is used, and the mighty God who could rebuke the waves of the ocean, the 'Lord of Hosts', *YYYY Sabaoth is His name*, is adjured by the amulet writer to preserve and protect the unborn child.

### Incantation bowls

The ancient Egyptian use of theurgic statues, in which the souls of demons or angels could be imprisoned, and the ancient Greek tradition whereby small hollow clay representations of the gods were used as receptacles for prayers written on sherds of pottery is similar to the Babylonian tradition of inscribing an incantation on a piece of earthenware. However, because Judaism forbids the manufacture and worship of idols or statues, the ink-written bowl served the same purpose as the artefacts of the Egyptian and Greek tradition. Incantation bowls were cheap everyday household items, with inscriptions written in Judaeo-Aramaic, Syriac and Mandaic. Representing a facet of the magical tradition of ancient Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt, bowls have been excavated from western Iran through a wide area of Iraq, including the famous site at Nippur. These bowl texts, often containing extracts from the Hebrew scriptures and other writings, do not use many Zoroastrian religious themes although there was an Iranian influence on Babylonian incantations. Incantation bowls were buried beneath the thresholds of private homes and demarcated the boundary of the dwelling. Highlighting the difference between the public and private spheres, their purpose was to prevent demonic intrusions. They were also found beneath four corners of a particular room, and have been identified as funerary charms in cemeteries.

In 1986, Alexander cited seventy Jewish Aramaic bowls as having been published, but towards the end of the twentieth century the number of published bowls had risen to well over a hundred.<sup>27</sup> Levene's 2003 publication, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls*, adds substantially to the literature.<sup>28</sup>

Magical inscriptions generally begin at the base of the interior of the bowl, winding around the inner curve of the bowl, sinuously curling from centre to outer rim. In some bowls the writing will be used on the exterior of the bowl, while on others the writing begins on the rim and ends in the centre of the bowl. The orthography of the bowls varies enormously, depending upon the skill and education of the spell-writer. The language of the texts varies too, in some cases being quite simple and crudely outspoken.

My first experience of actually holding a magic bowl occurred when Levene,



knowing my interest in incantation bowls, invited me to inspect several bowls that he was deciphering and translating. The bowl that he handed to me was a particularly fine specimen and I knew enough about the genre to appreciate exactly what lay in my hands: it was a simple artefact around 2,000 years old. It was cracked and repaired and was unquestionably an original manuscript. It was written in the finest Hebrew script, reminiscent of that used on the Dead Sea Scrolls, and it utilized turns of phrase similar to those of pure Talmudic language, reverberating with the condensed nature of Jewish Aramaic and the attendant demonology, magic and power. As Shaked has wittily observed,<sup>29</sup> of course demons are able to read Hebrew letters and words(!), and the act of reading the words curling around from the narrow base would no doubt cause dizziness. In order to read the flow of words, one has to turn the bowl continually. The words are the bearers of concepts of angelic strength and demonic malevolence, and, as they refer simultaneously to the world of inauspicious events and human misfortune, they also reflect paradoxically, the bowl's existence and purpose as an object of healing and beneficence, representing the client's ultimate well-being. The demon to whom the incantation was addressed would be close to swooning, simply from the effort of journeying again and again around the path created by words spiralling and undulating from the centre outwards, before it was trapped, overcome, crushed, bound and sealed within the confines of its earthenware prison, for the bowl would be buried upside down.

### *Magic bowl texts*

The incantation bowls found in excavations mainly around the ancient city of Nippur describe a world of demonic invasions against persons and their properties.

#### *Text I*

[The bowl is in the Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.] Translators' note: 'The text starts at the centre, where a circle is drawn, and runs in spirals towards the circumference. Near the rim of the bowl a large circle surrounds the text. No client's name is contained in the text of the incantation, but such names occur, quite unusually, on the outer surface of the bowl. The text has a number of parallels, both complete and partial.'

Interior of bowl:

Cursed [?] . . . Overturned, (overturned, overturned) overturned, overturned, overturned, overturned, is the earth and heaven, overturned are the stars and the planets, overturned is the talk of all the people, overturned is the curse of the mother and of the daughter, of the daughter-in-law and of the mother-in-law, overturned is the curse of men and women who stand in the open field and in the village, and on the

mountain and the temple(s) and the synagogue(s). Bound and sealed is the curse which she made. In the name of Betiel and Yequiel and in the name of *yyy* the Great, the angel who has eleven names: *sskb*<sup>2</sup>, *kbb*<sup>2</sup>, *knbr*<sup>2</sup>, *sdv*<sup>2</sup>, *swd'ry*<sup>2</sup>, *mryry*<sup>2</sup>, *'nqp*<sup>2</sup>, *'ns*, *psps*, *kbyby*, *bnwr*<sup>2</sup>. Whoever transgresses against those names, these angels, bound and sealed are all demons and evil spirits. All that is of the earth calls, and all that is of the heaven obeys.

I heard the voice of the earth, [and of] the heaven which receives all soul(s) from this world. I heard the voice of the woman who cursed, and sent against her the angels *nkyr nkyr yy* take vengeance, *yy* let us rejoice and rejoice, *yy kyss sss tym*<sup>2</sup> the woman who cursed. And they sent and injured her (away) from the eyes of the daughter that she may not avenge or curse.

Exterior of bowl

Dakya son of Qayyamta and Mahlepa son of (David?) and Sarka daughter of Alista (?) Miriam, daughter of Horan.

(Naveh and Shaked 1987: 135)

ANALYSIS

The disorder brought by demons and the powers of the universe is to be 'overturned' by this incantation, so that order once again reigns for the clients, Dakya and Mahlepa, Sarka and Miriam. Human agents, mothers, daughters, in-laws, men and women, wherever they may be, are 'bound and sealed' in the names of God, his angels, and the angel who has eleven names. Human 'talk' is that of the curse, while the 'voice of the earth and of heaven', that is, of God as proprietor of his creation, is marshalled against this vengeful curse.

*Text II*

[The bowl is in the Israel Museum.] Translators' note: 'This is one of a group of three bowls donated . . . to the Israel Museum by members of the family of the late Mr Alqanayan, a collector and businessman in Iran, executed by the revolutionary regime of Khomeini on the charge of supporting the State of Israel.'

By your name I make this amulet that it may be a healing to this one, for the threshold (of the house . . . and any possession which) he has. I bind the rocks of the earth, and tie down the mysteries of heaven, I suppress them . . . I rope, tie and suppress all demons and harmful spirits, all those which are in the world, whether masculine or feminine, from their big ones to their young ones, from their children to their old ones, whether I know his name or I do not know it. In case I do not know the

name, it has already been explained to me at the time of the seven days of creation. What has not been disclosed to me at the time of the seven days of creation was disclosed to me in the deed of divorce that came here from across the sea, which was written and sent to Rabbi Yehoshua bar Perahya. Just as there was a lilith who strangled human beings, and Rabbi Yehoshua bar Perahya sent a ban against her, but she did not accept it because he did not know her name; and her name was written in the deed of divorce and an announcement was made against her in heaven by a deed of divorce that came here from across the sea; so you too are roped, tied and suppressed, all of you under the feet of this Marnaqa son of Qala. In the name of Gabriel, the mighty hero, who kills all heroes who are victorious in battle, and in the name of Yeho'el who shuts the mouth of all [heroes]. In the name of Yah, Yah, Yah, Sabaoth. Amen, Amen, Selah.

(Naveh and Shaked 1987: 159)

#### ANALYSIS

It was not the 'victim' of the hex who was married to the demon, but the magician, who, by reason of his relationship with such spirits, had the power to issue a divorce, *get*, and was clearly the one who could forge and destroy his own link and relationship with a demonic power. The translator's note that 'the feature which occurs in this incantation for the first time is that the ban imposed by Joshua b Perahya was at first invalid because he did not know the name of that lilith, and only afterwards her name was written in the *get*. In Montgomery . . . The full parentage of the lilith is specified, as is legally appropriate'. [This 'full parentage' is given as: *Lilith Abitar Abikar Sahitra Kali Batzeh Taltui Kitsa*.<sup>30</sup>] Again, this incantation concludes with the formula of the prayer: 'Amen Selah,' and is in the name of the 'Lord of Hosts', *Yah Yah Yah Sabaoth*.

### Magic and the magician

In general, most scholars who write about Jewish magic believe that 'the absorption of prohibitory functions by the One God excludes, in the case of the Hebrews at least, the positive magical use of the unclean'.<sup>31</sup> Yet just as so many other instances of paradoxical assumptions and beliefs have surfaced during my research, so this assertion too holds a paradox. Strangely enough, the scrolls of Torah, Prophetic and Wisdom literature, the *Tanakh*, because of their sanctity, achieved the status of *mitmé'im et ha-yadayim*, paradoxically 'defiling the hands' of those who touched them. That which is innately pure is able to confer ritual impurity, so ritual washing of hands before *and* after using Torah scrolls for study or prayer, should take place.<sup>32</sup>

In addition, three instances can be cited where ritually impure objects were used for their magical and beneficent potency. Firstly, the Talmud permits the

use of a nail from a crucifix as an amulet, even though anything that has been in contact with a corpse would normally generate great ritual impurity. Secondly, Montgomery cites a Jewish-Aramaic incantation text that would have appeared on an earthenware bowl, but has instead been inscribed upon a human skull, which in itself is an object of ritual impurity. Thirdly, I shall discuss in more detail the *Hekhalot* text describing how the use of a piece of cloth that had been in contact with a ritually impure woman was used to release one of the Sages from danger in the celestial realms.<sup>33</sup>

During the early Talmudic period, the traditions of ritual purity required for sacrifice were upheld by those Sages who prepared themselves for ascent to the Chariot, the mystical journey where they themselves attempted to 'come close' to God, like the *qorban* via a sacrificed creature. The dangers of that supernatural voyage were akin to facing death by self-sacrifice, and in the 'Great Seance' described in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, an intricate ritual was performed by the *haverim*, the members of the elect group, to bring an adept back to earth. The Great Seance tells of Rabbi Nehuniah ben Haqanah, trapped in the danger zone, unable to return to the natural world. His rescue was effected by 'putting him into a state of very marginal ritual impurity, enough to cause the angels to dismiss him from the pure regions of heaven, but not sufficient to provoke them into attacking and destroying him'.<sup>34</sup>

This is how it was done: Rabbi Ishmael gave a 'very fine woollen cloth' to Rabbi Akiva, who gave it to a servant, telling him 'to lay this cloth beside a woman who immersed herself and yet had not become pure . . . For if that woman will come and declare the circumstances of her menstrual flow before the company, there will be one who forbids [her to her husband] and the majority will permit'. The woman was to touch the cloth very slightly, with 'the end of the middle finger of her hand . . . as a man who takes a hair which had fallen therein from his eyeball, pushing it very gently'. This was done, and the cloth was returned to Rabbi Ishmael, who 'inserted into it a bough of myrtle full of oil that had been soaked in pure balsam and they placed it upon the knees of Rabbi Nehuniah ben Haqanah; and immediately they [the angels] dismissed him from before the throne of glory where he had been sitting'.<sup>35</sup> This elaborate ritual, using the merest hint of menstrual pollution, indicates the strong belief in the positive power of the ritually impure.

Montgomery indicated how, despite orthodox proscriptions, spells and incantations nevertheless found their place in the *Weltanschauung* of the time:

The cultless condition of the Jews since AD 70 and the long previous term of six centuries in which the official cult was confined to one sanctuary must have incapacitated the Jew for the rites of the magician. He dared not make simulacra, many practices were out of the question because of their evidently heathen associations. But he had a holy book made up of sacred words, and a God unlike any of the pagans, who might not be seen, who once had spoken and who in lieu of images and

many sanctuaries was revealed in his Names. And so holy words and names became the province of the Jewish sorcery.

(Montgomery 1913: 112)

Mauss has described the relationship between the magician and a spirit as that of a contractual bond. 'Here we have a kind of legal tie binding the two parties', he wrote.<sup>36</sup> This analogy is applicable to the magic practised in Jewish spells; the spell-writer uses not only the legal method of 'sealing' the spirit and binding it to his will, exorcising it from the person or household, but there is also an instance in which a demon is given a bill of divorcement, a Jewish *get*, in order to dispel it permanently. The ability of the Sages Hanina ben Dosa and Abbaye, as mentioned earlier, to negotiate with *Agrat bat Mahalat*, the demon queen, persuading her to stop certain demonic actions, emphasizes this point. The Sage who could deal with a demon came close to operating as a magician. Mauss also writes, regarding *nomina barbara* or 'archaisms and ... incomprehensible terms', that 'from the very beginnings, practitioners of magic ... have mumbled their *abracadabras*'.<sup>37</sup> The magic of Jewish incantations certainly reveals this tendency to utilize the abecedary, as in some cases a range of angels is named alphabetically from *aleph* to *tav*. The name *abrasax* often occurs in the texts and is sometimes used in conjunction with a contraction of the tetragrammaton. The *mazziqin bishin* or evil destroyers and other spirits of maleficence are adjured in the same way as the Sages of *Merkavah* mysticism adjured the heavenly hosts in order to acquire their powers.

One of the most interesting characteristics of Jewish magic is the specificity of certain parts of the spell. The naming of clients' names follows the formula used in traditional Talmudic medical cures or prayers for the sick, where the patient and his or her mother are named. The usual patriarchal formula 'male (so and so), son of male', *ploni bar ploni*, or 'female (so and so), daughter of male', *plonita bat ploni* is eschewed, resting on the knowledge that *pater incertus, mater certa*. The efficacy of the spell is enhanced by identifying the victim or patient correctly as absolutely and unequivocally the offspring of the mother. Other links with traditional Jewish practice are found in quotes from the prayers or psalms, particularly Psalm 91, which mentions 'the terror by night ... the arrow that flies by day ... the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, or the plague that ravages at noon'. References to *Hekhalot*, or 'Heavenly Hall' literature appear on several amulets and incantation bowls. A particularly comprehensive *Hekhalot* text refers to the ministering angels, *malachei ha-sharet*, and incorporates the portrayal of God's powerful cohorts of angels and the fiery chariot. These references signify the transference of heavenly theurgic power to the magician and his magic spell.<sup>38</sup>

Three new, and at the time of writing, unpublished, bowl texts containing verses from the Talmudic tractate that describes the sacrificial rites of the Temple, *massechet zevachim*, have been found.<sup>39</sup> One of these bowl texts reads as follows:

Bound and sealed are the demons, *devs*, liliths, destructive demons, sorcerers, shutting-up demons, curses, vows and misfortunes. May you be removed from this house of Adib son of Bat-Shabbeta and from the dwelling of Fra<da>duk daughter of Mamai, his wife. By the name of 'The sin-offerings of the congregation and of individuals. These are the sin-offerings of the congregation: the he-goats offered at the new moons and at the set feasts are to be slaughtered on the north side, and their blood is received in a vessel of ministry <on> the north side. Their blood is required to be sprinkled by four acts of sprinkling on the four horns (of the altar). In what manner? The priest goes up the ramp and goes around the circuit. He comes to the south-eastern horn, then to the north-eastern, then to the north-western, and then to the south-western. The residue of the blood he would pour over the southern base. The offerings were consumed within the curtains, by males [of the priestly stock, and cooked for food in any fashion during that day and ni]ght until midnight'.<sup>40</sup>

The section of the Talmud that describes the sacrificial rites in minute detail is recited daily during morning prayers, which is when the sacrificial ceremony would have been performed. So this particular incantation illustrates the real connection between sacrifice, prayer and magic. The use of these words from *massechet zevachim* on a magic bowl brings a group of symbolic constructs to full circle, for the significance of references to the Temple service in magic has been shown in the texts quoted above, and allusions to the Temple, the Talmud, the liturgy and all they signify to those requiring theurgic efficacy provide a guarantee of potency in an incantation or spell. Levene notes that in his selection of incantation texts

it is . . . intriguing that from the seventeen verses which occur in our sample group of texts, all but two can be found in the weekly prayers. This could imply that our sorcerers are quoting their verses from liturgy rather than directly from the Old Testament.

He also writes that 'the utilisation of this liturgical material, which is intended for protection from the dangers of the night, is a natural choice'.<sup>41</sup>

## Discussion

Mauss has argued that 'it is clear . . . that magic, along with sacrifice, has provision for determining the time and place of ritual'. I have shown, by giving detailed descriptions of all these ceremonies, the complex and highly ritualized nature of sacrifice during the period when the Temple stood, how the significance of ritual in sacrifice was transmuted into liturgical description, and how this was transformed into rites of ascension for the Sages who wrote the *Hekhalot*

and *Merkavah* texts. The influence of concepts that have their roots in Temple ritual is also found in Jewish magic. No action could be performed without reference to purity of the operator, or the 'new-ness' and therefore unsullied nature of the material with which he worked, usually the magic bowl. However, Mauss does not believe that there is *more* to the relationship between sacrifice and magic, for he argues that 'magical objects, while they may not be consecrated in a religious sense, are at least medicated, and this provides them with a kind of magical consecration'.<sup>42</sup> I have shown how the spell-writers composed their incantations using sacred names and letters with direct references to sacred ritual, thereby 'consecrating' the magical objects. These scribes, confident of this powerful consecration within their incantations, thus reinforced the link between sacrifice and magic by their writings and compositions.

## EPILOGUE

Literature formulated and written during the period *c.*450 BCE to CE 700 provides the material that furnishes the substance of this book. The elaboration of a set of rituals combined with a myth of origin inspired an enduring way of life that has survived in various guises. Specific people, by virtue of their exceptional righteousness, were granted visionary experiences of God's immanence in the world. These visions were generally followed by acts of sacrificial offerings. Ancient Israelite sacrifice to the single God was based on the notion of drawing near to God by way of ritually acceptable offerings of birds and animals, cereals and wine.

The rite of sacrifice or 'drawing near', *qorban*, was initially dedicated to a God who manifested himself as pillars of smoke and fire, who made his dwelling-place a sacred Temple in Jerusalem, and whose power lay in his immortality, omniscience and omnipotence. As the circumstances of God's worshippers changed, so too those qualities constituting the nature of the holy God were perceived to have altered. When his earthly domain was destroyed, the central idea of the ritual, the *qorban*, engendered a transformation in which the Creator-God moved to the celestial realms and became the King of Heaven who could be approached by means of liturgical formulae and mysterious and mystical adjurations. Ezekiel's extraordinary vision of the celestial realm inspired an esoteric group of Rabbis to seek access to this heavenly kingdom. The powers vested in the Rabbis stemmed from their intimate contact with the numinous. This enabled them to record their experiences of the supernatural by means of their manipulation of holy letters and words contained in the liturgy. A transformation of this manipulative power ensued, in which the letters and words were appropriated by those who knew of them, and were able to use them in ways other than originally intended. Thus the supernatural magical or miraculous acts of the Rabbis, initially private and esoteric, were revealed to a public who, already convinced of the efficacy of holy letters and words, were able to utilize their inherent powers in prophylaxis against and management of misfortune.

The book examines notions of ritual purity and impurity, dealing with the ritually acceptable physical attributes required for the offering of sacrifice, whether



of the person wishing to make the offering, the priest mediating the rite, and the blemished or unblemished nature of the offering itself. What is evident, apart from the transformations that have evolved from the earliest sacrificial rites, is that the originators of the tradition and latter the Rabbis, felt able, in some circumstances, to endow people and objects with embodied and innate characteristics that appear, on analysis, to be ambivalent or ambiguous. The writings of Steiner and Douglas are pertinent and suggestive in this debate. Steiner's work on Taboo pointed out the inherent dangers that were vested in 'prohibited' people or objects, and Douglas expanded on this theme in her argument centred on ritual purity and the concomitant dangers of the anomalous in particular societies. Douglas has demonstrated how certain animals such as the camel, pig or hare, because they did not have both characteristics of chewing the cud *and* possessing a cloven hoof, were anomalous and prohibited as food. But these animals exist *ke-vriatan*, they are part of God's natural creation, and have been assigned their labels of ritual impurity, *tameh*, by humankind.

In the ancient Israelite worldview, the prohibitions relating to things that were *qadosh*, that is, holy or separated, were subsumed within the classification of the 'sacred' and 'profane'. Extrapolated from these categories were other states of being, including the ritually pure and impure, *tahor* and *tameh*, the proscribed, *herem*, and the mixture that was prohibited, *kil'ayim sha'atnez*. Creating mixtures was an area riven with prohibitory notions in Israelite beliefs. Humans are expected to refrain from acting as creators of forbidden mixtures, such as weaving garments of mixed wool and linen, or producing children from forbidden relationships.

I have shown how 'separate-ness' was a crucial element in that worldview. However, it is not possible to arrive at definite conclusions in every case where ambiguity or ambivalence regarding the culturally constructed identities of people or objects is concerned. Many of the cultural constructs of the Jewish worldview remain ambiguous and almost paradoxical. An example of the paradoxical in the scriptural text is the notion that although the blood of a slaughtered animal is rejected, sluiced away and may not be eaten because of its life-giving quality, this same substance is loaded with purificative significance. Every act of sacrifice that involved the slaughter of a beast or bird required blood to be shed. The blood was usually sprinkled, smeared or dashed upon an altar.

A different set of values was associated with the act of mixing various substances or utilizing the services of two different domestic creatures in a single act of agricultural labour when the ox was not to be yoked at the plough with the ass. The sanctity of holy incense, with its ingredients mixed in the Tabernacle, was very different from the separateness of the field in which a forbidden mixture of seeds had been sown. Both the incense and the produce of the field were prohibited, or holy, *qadosh*, but the forbidden field bore the stigma of anomaly in being an area that could not produce a ritually acceptable crop, namely neither one thing, say vines, nor the other, say wheat. The incense, on

the other hand, held a connotation of heightened separateness, because it could not be made by anyone other than specialized priests, and its mixture was *tahor*, of great ritual purity. Manufacturing, touching or smelling the incense brought death to the person who inappropriately did these things. And even in death the integrity of the human body was preserved, as one set of skeletal bones was not to be mixed with those of other corpses.

Being able to act as a 'creator' becomes possible only by proceeding according to God's instructions and with divine aid. God himself assures the regularity of the rainfall and the fecundity of the land. He administers the giving and taking of life, and holds the key to childbirth. But the rabbinic construction of existential reality also describes a sphere of anomalous beings, the angels and demons, who interfere in human affairs. The Sages attain access to God's supernal power by means of the adjuration, *hashva'ah*, the swearing of oaths or harnessing of angelic authority, using the symbolic power of the number seven, *sheva*. Demonic forces can be dispelled and routed by this means, and the realm of the anomalous or the infernal becomes accessible to qualified agents and operators.

The ability of actors to transmute ritual activities like sacrifice into ritually significant verbal descriptions of those actions and then transcribe those verbal transmutations into prayers, is one of the main themes examined in this work. The authority that rests in the liturgical transcription then facilitates a further transformation of the power of sacred words into the power of a magical inscription. The actors discern and retain a consciousness of the divine authority vested in sacred letters and words through the lived experience of changes that take place over time. Because of the repetitive nature of daily prayers and the active participation of actors in liturgical ritual, the belief in the efficacy of incantations is reinforced.

From the original requirements for the sacrificial rite, which included immersion in special waters, laundering of clothes and offerings of particular cereals and unblemished flesh, the ritual purity of the actors and operators remained and retained its central, pivotal importance in any act that aspired, consciously or unconsciously, to attempt the manipulation of fate. Whether the actor was performing a rite of sacrifice, enunciating a prayer or practising magic, purity of body and mind was essential. It was believed that God would accept praise and prayers, or the manipulation of objects, if the actors and their agents maintained a state of physical and spiritual ritual purity.

It is possible to trace the further symbolic development of the sacrificial ceremonies, liturgical performances and magical rituals that I have described in this book, over several centuries of Jewish life and thought. Although the rites of sacrifice had vanished with the destruction of the Temple, they retained their importance as a central, seminal theme of the liturgy.

The notion of 'drawing near' to God, *korban*, by means of sacrifice, was transformed into an idea of 'cleaving', *d'vekut*, and maintained the illusion of being close to God with the aid of religious and mystical formulae held in the

sacred letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Union with God then seemed possible, and the power of the words gained in importance within Kabbalistic thought. Yet another transformation allowed for the development of a system of thought and philosophy known as Hasidism. Although Scholem draws a distinction between the nature of *Merkava* mysticism and later Hasidic philosophy, where the Hasid, ‘for whom humility, restraint and self-abnegation rank higher than the pride of heart which fills the Merkabah visionary in the mystical presence of God’, there are clearly powerful ideological and intellectual connections between the two.<sup>1</sup>

Kabbalistic ideas are still utilized by powerful rabbis in contemporary Israel. The *Jerusalem Report*, 16 November 1995, published an article entitled: ‘Saddam survived. Now Rabin faces supernatural opposition’. The article opens with the sentence: ‘Yitzhak Rabin does not have long to live. The angels have their orders’. Prime Minister Rabin, advocating a ‘land for peace’ deal, was pilloried by right-wing extremists and branded a traitor. The article continues:

Suffering and death await the prime minister, or so say the kabbalists who have cursed him with the *pulsa denura* – Aramaic for ‘lashes of fire’ – for his ‘heretical’ policies. . . . For Jewish mystics of both North African and East European descent, curses taken from the tradition of ‘practical Kabbalah’ are heavy weaponry – not to be used every day, but certainly available in wars, religious struggles and even political battles. . . . Invoking the *pulsa denura* is a perilous undertaking, for if the ceremony is not performed in a strictly prescribed fashion, it can strike the conjurors themselves.<sup>2</sup>

The article cites the names of various people who fell under the curse of the Orthodox Rabbis and later died, and this has recently been reported again:

For years, the excavation of ancient sites has been the bane of the strictly Orthodox world. No major dig is now allowed to proceed – in theory at least – until it receives a certification from the rabbinate that it will not intrude on Jewish bones resting, perhaps for centuries, underground. Rabbis and archaeologists have frequently been at loggerheads and once the rows even occasioned a kabbalistic ceremony called *pulsa denura* that, so it is claimed, cut short the life of an archaeologist whose dig had disturbed the bones of the deceased.

(*The Jewish Chronicle* 4 April 2005)

Rabin himself was assassinated not long after the former article was published. In September 2004, the same threat was issued against another Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, for his policy of future Israeli withdrawal from certain territory. Coincidence, of course, may be claimed in these affairs, but the fact that Kabbalistic ceremonies are held at all, is the striking factor.

In contrast to the death curses described above, an article appearing to be in lighter vein but in fact displaying an earnest seriousness, from *The Jewish Chronicle* reads:

Fifty Rabbis and kabbalists took to the skies last week in a bid to bring rain to Israel. Blowing shofars [rams' horns] and reading from the Book of Psalms, the Rabbis flew for three hours over Israel in a plane belonging to the airline Arkia.<sup>3</sup>

(3 December 1999)

Such activities indicate how, over the centuries, faith in ceremonies and rituals, letters and words, has retained magical potency in the use of amuletic verses, symbolically significant numbers or objects, and messages directed to God. The concept of the *qadosh*, as discussed earlier, had two potential explanations: we could call one 'sacred', the other 'profane', but both enjoy the status of being 'separate'. In the same way, the sanctity of Temple sacrifice and synagogue prayer rituals is opposed by the profane (in its original sense of being 'outside the temple') customs utilizing religious magical symbols and associated rites. The religious symbolism of the Temple cult pervades the magic of the profane, yet innately related, customs that are practised in order to attain freedom from misfortune or the granting of a request. Today, whether as an amulet written as a personal talisman, or a cyber-message sent via the Internet to a designated intermediary site at the holiest place in Jerusalem,<sup>4</sup> the tradition survives. The act of producing a cryptic note, or *petek*, simply written on a scrap of paper, and pushing it into a cavity between the remaining giant stones of the Western wall, which was built to surround the Temple during Herodian times, is the *apogée* of these rituals. At this outer Wall, part of a protective barrier that encircled the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the rituals are once more centred on the holy site of the Temple, and the myths have been re-formulated to accommodate and reflect the changes in circumstance over a period of two and a half thousand years.

# NOTES

## 1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 1 Professor Kottek kindly enabled me to attend the conference that he organized, 'From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature', held in Jerusalem, September 1996.
- 2 I first heard Dr Finkel speak at the Wellcome Institute, London (October 1994), where he gave a lecture entitled 'New Evidence for a Babylonian Medical School'. The British Museum held an Evening Opening on the theme 'Medicine and Magic' (November 1994), where Dr Finkel lectured on his research, and I heard him again in Jerusalem (September 1996), where he spoke at the Conference 'From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature'. His work on cuneiform inscriptions is ongoing, and he has access to the British Museum's store of approximately 130,000 tablets, most of which have lain undeciphered in the Museum's storerooms since the last century, when they were brought from Mesopotamia by various archaeological expeditions.

## 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1 Deuteronomy 32: 39: 'See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no God with Me; I kill, and I make alive; I have wounded, and I heal; And there is none that can deliver out of My hand'.  
I Samuel 2: 6: 'The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up'.  
Isaiah 45: 7: 'I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things'.
- 2 Aramaic, a Semitic language originating in ancient Aram, (Syria) became the *lingua franca* of the Persian Empire during the fifth century BCE.  
Mandaic is a form of Aramaic used by a sect of Gnostics; the word is derived from the Aramaic for 'knowledge', *manda*.
- 3 The translations of Talmud used in Preuss are not as accurate as modern linguists would like them to be. Plant names are not researched and the syntax is also questionable. Assyriologists and modern scholarship provide much-needed assistance in this respect. Preuss often takes the opinion of the mediaeval Talmudists, Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak, France 1040–1105) as well as the great philosopher known as Maimonides, or the Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, Spain and Egypt 1135–1204); this means that my analysis of some cases would be flawed by use of late material, instead of pristine *Mishnah* and *Gemara*.
- 4 Hallo 1996: 15; 57–59; 65.
- 5 James 1993: 282.

- 6 Hallo 1996: 28.
- 7 Hallo 1996: 159.
- 8 Bottéro 1992: 84; Carter 1987: 142.
- 9 Bottéro 1992: 86; Dever 1987: 170; Naveh 1982.
- 10 Trigger 2003: 23–4. He cites Childe's 'New light on the most ancient East' (1934) and Frankfort's 'The birth of civilization in the Near East' (1956).
- 11 Trigger 2003: 'Childe . . . attributed this difference to a contingent divergence in the ways the ruling classes in these two civilizations had devised to extract food surpluses from farmers.'
- 12 Hallo (1996) mentions:
- p. 19: using units of silver as 'money before coinage'.
  - p. 34: the use of 'a letter enclosed in an envelope bearing the stamp seal and caption of the sender *and* the name of the addressee'.
  - p. 44: 'textile-manufacture and metallurgy were the twin pillars of ancient Near Eastern industry in general'.
  - p. 54: 'legal concerns (such as) rents and negligence' and 'precedent law', namely §53 of the Akkadian 'Laws of Eshnunna': 'If an ox has gored another ox and caused its death, the owners of both oxen shall divide the price of the living ox and the flesh of the dead ox'. (and cf Exodus 21: 35).
  - p. 82: 'True cartography, it is often assumed, began with the Egyptians' (fourteenth century BCE) . . . 'The first unquestionable maps from Mesopotamia date from the Sargonic period, and are almost a millennium older. . . . This is also the time . . . of the oldest architectural ground plans of buildings, including temples'.
  - p. 85: 'Lists . . . featuring geographical names . . . form part of the literature of the third millennium. . . . This literature includes, in addition to a few mathematical exercises, lists of professional names, animal names, plant and tree names, metals, textiles and vessels'.
  - p. 101: 'fermentation of grapes and barley for wine and beer – the tablet from Ur lists no less than five varieties (of beer)'.
  - p. 138: 'the Greek achievement in mathematical astronomy . . . is the direct heir of the Babylonian legacy'.
  - p. 151: literary texts in the curriculum of scribal schools.
- 13 Bottéro 1992: 172.
- 14 Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1996: 15–21. Yaron (1988: 11–12) writes, regarding the Code of Hammurabi, the Laws of Lipit-Ishtar and the Laws of Eshnunna, that 'all these are legal rules of political entities not dependent on each other. But while it is quite true that each of these states has to be credited with its own, peculiar, local positive law, it is no less true that to a considerable extent we have here customary laws and practices common to the ancient Near East. There was close and continuous contact between the various neighbouring cities and states, and it is not unlikely that there was also considerable traffic in legal notions and practices. . . . It is a fascinating process which can be observed throughout the ages, for example in the Bible and Talmud (and) in early and post-classical Roman law'.
- 15 Viéyra 1965: 58.
- 16 Bottéro 1992: 166.
- 17 For Roman law see Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 20.1.13.
- 18 Bottéro 1992: 135
- 19 Taken from Dr Finkel's leaflet on 'Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine':

A RECIPE FOR THE *ASÛTU* TO TREAT A SKIN AILMENT:

- |    |  |    |                                     |
|----|--|----|-------------------------------------|
| 1  | $\frac{1}{2}$ sheqel of 'white' plant          | 13 | You wash                            |
| 2  | $\frac{1}{2}$ sheqel of <i>buqumattu</i> plant | 14 | The red sore                        |
| 3  | $\frac{1}{2}$ sheqel of <i>ashar</i>           | 15 | In hot water                        |
| 4  | A 'fourth' of antimony                         | 16 | After washing                       |
| 5  | 2 sheqels of ox fat                            | 17 | The red sore                        |
| 6  | 2 sheqels of wax                               | 18 | You apply the salve                 |
| 7  | 1 sheqel of bat-                               | 19 | To improve a red sore               |
| 8  | semen (?)                                      | 20 | And <i>rasanu</i>                   |
| 9  | $\frac{1}{2}$ sheqel of <i>inzarû</i>          | 21 | You apply the salve<br>twice a day. |
| 10 | $\frac{1}{2}$ sheqel of silver                 | 22 | Written according to<br>dictation.  |
| 11 | You cook                                       |    |                                     |
| 12 | In olive oil                                   |    |                                     |

A MAGICAL "CONCOCTION" FROM THE *ASHIPUTU* FOR WOMEN'S PROBLEMS:

- |   |   |    |  |
|---|---|----|--|
| 1 | If a woman tends to lose her foetus in the first month, second month                          | 8  | 1 sheqel almonds   |
| 2 | or third month, dry a <i>hulû</i> mouse   | 9  | With fatty material from the mouth of a vat                          |
| 3 | Crush and grind it up, (add) water three times, and mix it with oil                           | 10 | You make a tampon, insert it in (her) vagina and                     |
| 4 | Add <i>alluharu</i> (mineral). You give it to her to drink, and she will not lose her foetus. | 11 | She will 'open' and will become pregnant and (her) waters will flow. |
| 5 | In order to make a barren woman pregnant you mix four plants, four (pieces) of bread (?)      | 12 | To make a barren woman pregnant                                      |
| 6 | <i>kukru</i> aromatic, $\frac{1}{2}$ sheqel juniper   | 13 | You flay an edible mouse   |
| 7 | 1 sheqel of fenugreek, 1 sheqel of stinking sesame (?)  | 14 | Open up, fill with <i>murru</i>                                      |
|   |   | 15 | Dry in the shade crush, grind and mix with fat                       |
|   |   | 16 | Place in vagina and she will become pregnant.                        |
- 20 There are no exact parallels from the Talmud to Dr Finkel's work quoted above (see previous note). However, I offer other examples of Talmudic remedies:

Different ways to treat an abscess: (Cohen 1975: 256):

For an abscess take a measure equal to a fourth of a *log* of wine with purple coloured aloe . . . For an abscess use this incantation, '*Bazbaziah, Masmasiah, Kaskasiah, Sarlai, and Amarlai are the angels sent from the land of Sodom to cure painful abscesses. Bazach bazich bazbazich masmasich kamon kamich. Thine appearance remain in thee, thine appearance remain in thee, thy place remain in thee (and do not spread), thy seed be like a hybrid and like a mule which are sterile; so mayest thou also be sterile in the body of A son of B'* [Shabbat 67a].

According to Preuss (1993: 468), the 'most terrible fate that an ancient Hebrew woman (could) imagine (was) to die childless'.

Treatment of Vaginal Bleeding: (Preuss 1993: 379)

'The "cup of the unfruitful" *kos shel akarin*, or perhaps more correctly the "cup of roots", *kos shel ikarin*. According to Rabbi Yochanan, it consists of a ground mixture':

1 zuz Alexandrian gum, alum, garden crocus, mixed with grape wine or beer (*shechar*); given as protection against infertility.

Against Vaginal Bleeding: (selection from Preuss 1993)

Another remedy is as follows: Take three measures of Persian (large) onions, boil them in wine, make her drink it and say to her 'Cease your discharge!'

Another remedy: place the woman at a crossroads, give her a cup of wine in her hand, have a man come up from behind and frighten her and exclaim: 'Cease your discharge!' . . .

Another remedy: take six drops of sealing clay from a vessel, smear her therewith, and say to her: 'Cease your discharge!' . . .

Another remedy: dig seven holes and burn therein young shoots of *orlah* (whose vine is not yet three years old); then put a cup of wine into the woman's hand, make her rise from one hole and seat her on the next, make her rise from that one and seat her on the third one, and so on, and at each hole say to her: 'Cease your discharge!' . . .

Another remedy: take barley grain which is found in the dung of a white mule; if the woman holds it for one day, her discharge will cease for two days; if she holds it for two days, it will cease for three days; but if she holds it for three days, it will cease forever.

[Shabbat 110ab].

21 Schiffman and Swartz 1992: 24.

22 Kingsley 1992.

23 James (1993: 368) discusses the 'widely differing dates (that) have been offered by modern scholars for the Israelite Conquest (of Canaan), ranging (at the extremes) between 2300 and 1150 BC'. With the Egyptian twelfth Dynasty as a 'landmark', he allocates the period 2000–1600 BCE as the era of the Hebrew patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He asserts that: 'As Solomon's Temple was built in the mid-10th century BC, the Exodus would have taken place *circa* 1450 BC and the conquest 1400 BC'.

24 Roaf 1990: 178.

25 II Kings 25: 12.

26 Neusner 1990: 28–9.

27 Talmon 1991: 21.

28 Talmon 1991: 26.

29 Widengren 1961.

30 Momigliano 1990: 82.

31 Momigliano 1990: 83.

32 Momigliano 1990: 85–6.

33 Margolis and Marx 1960: 149.

34 Smith 1973: 47.

35 Margolis and Marx 1960: 145.

36 Margolis and Marx 1960: 164.

37 Margolis and Marx 1960: 166.

### 3 LITERARY SOURCES

1 Cited by Jacobs 1995: 66.

2 Wellhausen 1957: 3.

3 Hertz Pentateuch 1985: vii.

4 Davies 1994: 29.

5 Professors Israel Levine, Yair Zakobovitz, Sarah Yefet and Nadav Neeman.

6 Professors Amichai Mazar, Zechariah Klai, Yisrael Finkelstein and Amnon Ben-Tor.



- 7 The first known printed edition of the Talmud appeared in 1482, in Guadalajara, Spain. Unfinished versions were printed in Italy, in the towns of Soncino and Piarro. In 1520, with permission from Pope Leo X, Daniel Bomberg of Antwerp printed the first definitive edition of the Babylonian Talmud in Venice. Important later editions were published in Vilna and Slavuta.
- 8 Vermes 1990: xiii.
- 9 Because the scrolls are written on animal skins, there are now plans to use the DNA of the skins to facilitate the matching of fragments. (Professor Mark Geller, personal communication).
- 10 Schiffman 1993a: 45: 'Texts like the book of Noah, as well as the books of Daniel and Enoch, have a common structure: Heavenly secrets of the present and of the end of days are revealed to the hero. These texts often involve heavenly ascents and other journeys of this kind frequently found in later Jewish mysticism'.
- 11 Katzman 1993: 263.
- 12 The Talmud is our only source of information about the private lives of the Sages and the lineage details were published for use and maintenance of genealogical tables. These were for use of the Rabbi and his disciples only.
- 13 Kingsley (1992) discusses the word *chashmal* in detail. 'The first and last time this word occurs in the Bible is in Ezekiel, which means there are no other biblical passages that could help to clarify its sense'. In the Septuagint, the word was translated as *elektron*, which can mean either 'amber' or 'electrum', an alloy of gold and silver.
- 14 These winged figures were later used in the iconography of mediaeval Christian art to symbolize the Four Evangelists, namely the eagle of St John, the winged man of St Matthew, the winged bull of St Luke and the winged lion of St Mark.
- 15 Scholem 1946: 50.
- 16 Neusner 1971: 150–3.
- 17 Scholem 1946: 47.
- 18 Scholem 1946: 42; Steinsaltz 1976: 212–13.
- 19 Hagigah 2: 1.
- 20 Scholem 1946: 50.
- 21 Cohn-Sherbok 1995: 16.
- 22 Elijior 1997.
- 23 Geller 1991; Geller and Cohen 1995.
- 24 Hunter 1994, 1995.
- 25 Naveh and Shaked 1987: 9.
- 26 Shaked 1995: 206.
- 27 Geller and Levene 1998: 335.
- 28 Abusch 1989: 36.
- 29 Mauss 2003: 22–3.
- 30 Mauss 2003: 26.
- 31 Jacob Barnai: 'The Hasidic Immigration to Erets Yisrael' in Rapoport-Albert 1997: 378.
- 32 A variation in the terms is also used to describe the angelic and demonic hierarchy of the seven heavens: metatron, zaphkiel, raziel, samael, zadkiel, michael, raphael, haniel, seraphim, hashmalim, sandalphon, benei elohim, tarshishim, ishim, cherubim.
- 33 See Ben Shimon Halevi (1979) for a comprehensive listing and many reproductions of the variety of diagrammatic representations of the *sefirot*.
- 34 Meijers 1990:

In de joodse volksgeneeskunde is een groot aantal van dergelijke medicijnen bekend, waarvan echter maar matig gebruik gemaakt wordt. Vrij algemeen geeft men de voorkeur aan de arts met zijn reguliere geneeskunde. Er zijn echter enkele uitzonderingen en één daarvan is de behandeling van geelzucht. Men kent daarvoor een methode, die met recht 'alternatief' mag worden

genoemd, omdat ze – voortkomend uit een geheel ander kennisarsenaal - buiten het gangbare medische paradigma valt. Deze andere bron van kennis vormt de Talmoed in het orthodoxe jodendom. . . . Bij de Reb Arrelech hoorde ik, dat men de ‘duivendokter’ liet komen als iemand geelzucht kreeg. Deze kon een zieke genezen door een aantal duiven op de buik van de patiënt te zetten, wat ten gevolge zou hebben dat de dieren na enkele minuten stierven. Daarna zou de ziekte verdwenen zijn.

- 35 Dr Simon Dein, Medical Anthropology Seminar held at University College London, 1990.
- 36 Idel 1998: 1.
- 37 Idel 1988: 86.
- 38 Idel 1998: 213.
- 39 Idel 1988: 111.
- 40 Idel 1997: 395.
- 41 Many of his followers deny that he died, considering him to be the Messiah, who will return, heralding the Messianic Age and the rebuilding of the Temple.

#### 4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- 1 Douglas’ treatment of the book of Leviticus offers an analysis of the ritual of Temple sacrifice and provides a compelling argument at different levels of interpretation. (personal communication).
- 2 Goldberg 1987: 3–4; Eilberg-Schwartz 1990: 28.
- 3 The ruins of Khirbet Qumran lie on the north-western shore of the Dead Sea. It is thought that an ascetic Jewish sect, the Essenes, lived in the settlement. The Essenes are mentioned in the writings of Josephus, Philo of Alexandria and Pliny the Elder, and the Dead Sea Scrolls are thought by many scholars to have been the product of the Essene community.
- 4 Traditionally Jews have buried old manuscripts or paper, such as prayer books and other sacred writings, in the consecrated ground of a cemetery. Before burial, however, they were stored in a special concealed room, a *genizah*, within the precincts of, or in the same building as, a synagogue. The site of the Cairo Genizah, in the Ben Ezra synagogue, is thought to have belonged to the congregation of Palestinian Jews of antiquity. From the late nineteenth century onwards, a few Jewish travellers knew about the Genizah in the Ben Ezra synagogue and some documents were removed and taken to Europe. Most famously, two mediaeval, incomplete copies of the ‘CD’ or Damascus Rule, were removed in 1897. Around sixty years later, substantial fragments of the same document were found in three of the caves at Qumran – but these were original manuscripts, dating from around 100 BCE. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Dr Solomon Schechter had obtained permission to remove all the material from the Genizah and this is now housed in Cambridge University Library. There are about 140,000 fragments of documents and texts in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah collection.
- 5 Frazer (1890) 1991: 711.
- 6 Tambiah 1990: 85.
- 7 Tambiah 1990: 85.
- 8 Tambiah 1990: 7.
- 9 Steinsaltz 1976: 5.
- 10 Eruvin 19a.
- 11 De Heusch 1985: 84.

5 SANCTUARY, TEMPLE AND SYNAGOGUE: JEWISH SECTS;  
MAGIC AND MAGICIANS

- 1 Genesis 4: 4; 8: 20; 22: 9.
- 2 I Samuel 4: 11.
- 3 I Samuel 6: 15.
- 4 Fisch (1970: 30) describes the *High Places* discovered at Taanach, Gezer and Petra. General features appear to have included an altar, standing stones and *asherah* or sacred pole, a laver for ritual purification, a sacred cave, and depository for refuse.
- 5 Proverbs 15: 8.
- 6 In the Order *Qodashim*, tractates *Zevachim* and *Middot* delineate rules for the Altar and Sacrificial offerings, and Measurements. In the Order *Mo'ed*, tractate *Yoma* describes the service of the Day of Atonement, and tractates *Sheqalim* and *Ta'anit* provide other details of the Temple.
- 7 Derekh Eretz Zuta 9: 13.
- 8 Genesis 3: 18.
- 9 Ezekiel 48: 35.
- 10 There were no images in the Temple. Josephus, who was himself of priestly descent and knew many details about the Temple and its ritual, wrote of the innermost chamber of the Sanctuary on the Temple Mount (*War*: 304): 'Nothing at all was kept in it; it was unapproachable, inviolable, and invisible to all, and was called the Holy of Holies'.
- 11 Wigoder 1986: 17. The synagogue patterns, prayer forms and liturgies laid down at that time have remained constant to this day.
- 12 Talmon 1991: 206–7.
- 13 Hosea 14: 3.
- 14 Betz 1993: 211.
- 15 Wigoder 1986: 18.
- 16 Wigoder 1986: 11.
- 17 Wigoder 1986: 10.
- 18 Wigoder 1986: 9.
- 19 Acts 15: 21.
- 20 Wigoder 1986: 11.
- 21 Wigoder 1986: 16.
- 22 Levine 1982: 1.
- 23 Cross 1993a: 24.
- 24 Hillel was a woodcutter, Shammai was a builder, R. Joshua was a blacksmith, R. Chanina was a shoemaker, R. Huna was a water-carrier, R. Abba was a tailor.
- 25 Exodus 28: 30.
- 26 Pliny *Natural History* V: 17.
- 27 Yadin (1957: 66) writes that Clermont Ganneau, who carried out minor excavations at Qumran in the nineteenth century, remarked that the orientation of the graves was not east–west, that is, facing Mecca. The graves were, according to the local Arabs, the 'tombs of Kuffar, that is to say unbelievers, non-Mussulmans'.
- 28 Kottek 1994: 139.
- 29 Vanderkam 1993: 52.
- 30 Talmon 1991: 45–7.
- 31 Talmon 1991: 42.
- 32 Betz 1993: 214.
- 33 Cross 1993b: 163–4.
- 34 Kalmin 1998.
- 35 Steinsaltz 1976: 99.
- 36 Sanhedrin 17a.

- 37 Proverbs 8: 22.
- 38 Proverbs 1: 7.
- 39 Mauss 1950.
- 40 Genesis 3: 5
- 41 Proverbs 3: 18; 8: 36.
- 42 Neusner 1978: 79.
- 43 Shabbat 67a.
- 44 Baba Metzia 86a.
- 45 Schäfer 1992: 51.
- 46 Schäfer 1992: 56.
- 47 Schäfer 1992: 90.
- 48 Shabbat 31a.
- 49 Sanhedrin 65b/66a.
- 50 Sanhedrin 66a.
- 51 Sanhedrin 65b.
- 52 Genesis 3: 24.
- 53 Exodus 7: 11.
- 54 Exodus 7: 22.
- 55 Sanhedrin 65b. The *Sefer Yetzirah* (second century BCE) contains mystical ideas similar to Babylonian, Egyptian and Hellenistic ideas current at that time.
- 56 Berachot 55a.
- 57 Megillah 7b.
- 58 Shabbat 34a; Baba Batra 75a.
- 59 Geller and Levene 1998: 334.
- 60 Shabbat 67a.
- 61 Shabbat 67a.
- 62 Lloyd 1990: 43.

## 6 *EL SHADDAI* – THE MIGHTY HEBREW GOD: HIS COVENANTS WITH THE RIGHTEOUS

- 1 Exodus 20: 15; 24: 7–8.
- 2 Rappoport 1995: 272–3: ‘Come,’ said the Lord, [to Moses]

‘I will send thee unto Pharaoh to deliver the people of Israel.’ . . . ‘Lord of the Universe!’ [Moses] said, ‘when I come to the children of Israel, they will ask me: “Who sent thee?” what can I say? I shall not be able to tell them Thy name.’ ‘Dost thou desire to know My name?’ said the Lord. ‘Know then that My name is according to My acts. *Elohim* is my name when I judge My creatures, and I am Lord of Hosts, *Zebaoth*, when I lend strength to men in battle, enabling them to rise and conquer their enemies; I am *Yahveh* or *Adonai* when I have mercy upon My creatures; and I am *El Shaddai* when I am Lord of all strength and power.’

- 3 Deuteronomy 6: 4.
- 4 Deuteronomy 31: 21.
- 5 Genesis 1: 26.
- 6 Genesis 4: 10.
- 7 Deuteronomy 16: 20.
- 8 Isaiah 1: 16–17.
- 9 Genesis 15: 6.
- 10 Genesis 15: 5.
- 11 Genesis 17: 20–1.

- 12 Genesis 32: 25–33.
- 13 The *Asseret Ha-Dibbrot*, or Decalogue, translation from the Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh – The Holy Scriptures*:
- i I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods besides Me.
  - ii You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.
  - iii You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.
  - iv Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work – you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.
  - v Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you.
  - vi You shall not murder.
  - vii You shall not commit adultery.
  - viii You shall not steal.
  - ix You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
  - x You shall not covet your neighbour's house: you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's.
- 14 Exodus 20: 6,12.
- 15 Leviticus 20: 7–8.
- 16 Leviticus 18–20.
- 17 Numbers 15:32 (the consequence of desecrating the Sabbath):
- Once, when the Israelites were in the wilderness, they came upon a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. Those who found him as he was gathering wood brought him before Moses, Aaron and the whole community. He was placed in custody, for it had not been specified what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'The man shall be put to death: the whole community shall pelt him with stones outside the camp'. So the whole community took him outside the camp and stoned him to death.
- 18 Exodus 24: 8.
- 19 Robertson Smith (Smith, W.R.) 1972: 115.
- 20 Numbers 15: 3–14.
- 21 Deuteronomy 23: 29; Exodus 21: 33–5 and 22: 1–5; Deuteronomy 12: 13 & 25: 1; Exodus 21: 23–5 and Deuteronomy 19: 21; Deuteronomy 25: 11–12.
- 22 Deuteronomy 17: 8–10.
- 23 Deuteronomy 24: 7; Leviticus 24: 17.
- 24 Exodus 21: 12.
- 25 Robertson Smith (Smith, W.R.) 1972: 436.
- 26 Leviticus 24: 12–13.
- 27 Robertson Smith (Smith, W.R.) 1972: 418.

- 28 Leviticus 4: 15.  
 29 Numbers 15: 30.  
 30 Deuteronomy 18: 10ff.  
 31 Leviticus 9: 26, 31; Exodus 22: 17; Leviticus 20: 6.  
 32 Leviticus 20: 17. The full list of the laws of incest is to be found in Leviticus 18: 6–20 and 20: 20–1.  
 33 Leviticus 20: 10, 13.  
 34 Leviticus 20: 14, 19.  
 35 Deuteronomy 22: 23–7.  
 36 Deuteronomy 22: 13.  
 37 Deuteronomy 7: 3–4.  
 38 Numbers 25: 1.  
 39 Deuteronomy 7: 26.  
 40 Deuteronomy 16: 21.  
 41 Hertz 1985: 1012; 552; 366; 775.  
 Freedman 1961: 11, 288:

The archaeological site of *Tahpanhes*, on the Egyptian frontier, corresponds to the Greek *Daphnae Pelusii*, which Flinders Petrie described as ‘an important fortress on the eastern branch of the Nile commanding the road to Palestine’. Here Petrie discovered ‘a stele which by its characteristic features evidenced heathen worship by Jews’.

- 42 Leviticus 18: 21.

#### 7 THE ‘SACRED’ AND THE ‘PROFANE’

- 1 The Pentateuch comprises the books Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Around 300 BCE the original Hebrew was translated into Greek for the Jews who lived in Alexandria. The ‘Septuagint’ was the work of seventy-two Jewish scholars.  
 2 Leviticus 25: 23  
 3 Leviticus 19: 1: ‘You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy’.  
 4 Lukes 1973: 40.  
 5 Jones 1993: 40, cited by Mestrovic 1994.  
 6 Eilberg-Schwartz 1990: ‘The operation of this opposition is evident, for example, if one compares the work of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. Durkheim . . . formulated his theories by studying the Australian aborigines. These societies, Durkheim assumed, were the most primitive and simplest available for study. Studying them would enable him to understand the origin and function of religion in a way that was not possible when studying religion in complex and developed societies’.  
 7 Bottéro 1992: 188.  
 8 Exodus 20: 3: ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me’;  
 Exodus 22: 19: ‘He that sacrificeth unto the gods (*elohim*), save unto the Lord (*YHVH*) only, shall be utterly destroyed’;  
 Exodus 23: 13: ‘ . . . and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth’;  
 Deuteronomy 4: 19: ‘And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them. These the Lord your God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven’.  
 9 Douglas 1993: 158.  
 10 Eilberg-Schwartz 1990: 254.  
 11 Durkheim (1915) 1971: 358.

- 12 Leviticus 10: 10.
- 13 Durkheim 1971: 74 cites Max Müller (*Physical Religion*):
- at first sight, nothing seemed less natural than nature. Nature was the greatest surprise, a terror, a marvel, a standing miracle and it was only on account of their permanence, constancy and regular occurrence that certain features of that standing miracle were called natural, in the sense of foreseen, common, intelligible . . . It was that vast domain of surprise, of terror, of marvel, of miracle, the unknown as distinguished from the known, or as I like to express it, the infinite, as distinct from the finite, which supplied from the earliest times the impulse to religious thought and language.
- 14 *Le-hav'dil* is used to describe the distinction between the Israelite and Egyptian flocks and herds during the Ten Plagues prior to the Exodus – again, this is division, not separation.
- 15 Robertson Smith (1894) 1972: 60: ‘the god, as father, stands by the majority of the tribe in enforcing tribal law against refractory members: outlawry, which is the only punishment ordinarily applicable to a clansman, carries with it excommunication from religious communion, and the man who defies tribal law has to fear the god as well as his fellow-men’.
- 16 Durkheim 1971: 409.
- 17 Bottéro 1992: 189.
- 18 Deuteronomy 23: 18: ‘No Israelite woman shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any Israelite man be a cult prostitute’.
- 19 Deuteronomy 22: 9.
- 20 Deuteronomy 22: 10.
- 21 Leviticus 19: 19: ‘You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; you shall not put on cloth from a mixture of two kinds of material’.
- 22 Leviticus 19: 19 (*sha’atnez*).
- 23 Deuteronomy 22: 5: ‘A woman must not put on man’s apparel, nor shall a man wear woman’s clothing; for whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord your God’.
- 24 Bottéro 1992: 189.
- 25 Leviticus 27: 28: ‘But of all that anyone owns, be it man or beast or land of his holding, nothing that he has proscribed for the Lord may be sold or redeemed; every proscribed thing is totally consecrated to the Lord’.
- 26 The concept of *niddah* is also pertinent here, but the meaning is sometimes obscure.
- 27 The notion of contiguity generates two possibilities – Durkheim 1971: 356: [The idea of contagion is inherent in some forms of ritual pollution.] (i) ‘anything touching an object also touches everything which has any relation of proximity or unity whatsoever with this object’. (ii) [like produces like] – ‘The representation of a being or condition produces this being or condition’. [Herein lies the idea of transference behind animal sacrifice, where the polluted person brings a sacrificial offering to the priest, and lays hands upon the head of the beast before the required ritual.]
- 28 The word is also found in the phrase ‘the water of sprinkling’ which describes the purification ceremony after contact with a corpse. The text would appear to indicate ‘water of isolation’, indicating the nature of this water and the unclean state which is reversed by its use: Numbers 19: 20–3: If anyone who has become unclean fails to cleanse himself, that person shall be cut off from the congregation, for he has defiled the Lord’s sanctuary. The water of lustration (*me’ niddah*) was not dashed on him: he is unclean. That shall be for them a law for all time. Further, he who sprinkled the water of lustration shall wash his clothes; and whoever touches the water of lustration

- shall be unclean until evening. Whatever that unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches him shall be unclean until evening’.
- 29 Leviticus 17: 10–11: ‘And if anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who reside among them partakes of any blood, I will set My face against the person who partakes of the blood, and I will cut him off from among his kin. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives upon the altar; it is the blood, as life, that effects expiation’.
- 30 Pickering 1984: 115.
- 31 Pickering 1984: 117.
- 32 Douglas 1966: 54.
- 33 Durkheim 1971: 411.
- 34 Leviticus 19: 5.
- 35 Exodus 3: 2 ff.
- 36 Joshua 5: 13–15.
- 37 Exodus 13: 2: ‘The Lord spoke further to Moses saying, Consecrate to me every first-born man and beast, the first issue of every womb among the Israelites is mine (*qadesh li kol b’chor*)’.
- 38 Exodus 13: 15.
- 39 Nazir is also translated as ‘guard’.
- 40 Numbers 6: 9: ‘If a person dies suddenly near him, defiling his consecrated hair, he shall shave his head on the day he becomes clean; he shall shave it on the seventh day. On the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two pigeons to the priest, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The priest shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, and make expiation on his behalf for the guilt that he incurred through the corpse. That same day he shall reconsecrate his head and rededicate to the Lord his term as nazirite; and he shall bring a lamb in its first year as a penalty offering. The previous period shall be void, since his consecrated hair was defiled’.
- 41 Numbers 6: 18.
- 42 Exodus 20: 8: ‘Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days shall you labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work – you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements’.
- 43 Durkheim 1971: 307: in ‘the life of the Australian’.
- 44 Leviticus 18: 28.
- 45 Leviticus 23: 3ff.: ‘In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month . . . you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days. On the first day you shall celebrate a sacred occasion . . . the seventh day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations’.
- 46 Seven weeks after the Passover, offerings of first fruits, grains, flocks and herds were brought to the priest as an ‘offering before the Lord; they shall be holy to the Lord, for the priest. On that same day you shall hold a celebration; it shall be a sacred occasion for you; you shall not work at your occupations’.
- 47 ‘On the fifteenth day of this seventh month there shall be the Feast of Tabernacles to the Lord, [to last] seven days. The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations: seven days you shall bring offerings by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall observe a sacred occasion and bring an offering by fire to the Lord; it is a solemn gathering: you shall not work at your occupations’.
- 48 ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts (of horns). You shall not work at your occupations; and you shall bring an offering by fire to the Lord. . . . the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be a sacred occasion for



- you: you shall practice self-denial, and you shall bring an offering by fire to the Lord; you shall do no work throughout that day. For it is a Day of Atonement, on which expiation is made on your behalf before the Lord your God . . . any person who does not practice self-denial throughout that day shall be cut off from his kin; and whoever does any work throughout that day, I will cause that person to perish from among his people’.
- 49 Durkheim 1971 *re* the Intichiuma of Australia.
- 50 Leviticus 27: 30–2: ‘All tithes from the land, whether seed from the ground or fruit from the tree, are the Lord’s; they are holy (*qadosh*) to the Lord . . . All tithes of the herd or flock . . . shall be holy to the Lord’.
- Numbers 18: 12: ‘All the best of the new oil, wine, and grain – the choice parts that they [the people] present to the Lord – I give to you [the Levites] . . . Everything that has been proscribed (*cherem*) in Israel shall be yours. The first issue of the womb of every being, man or beast, that is offered to the Lord, shall be yours. But you shall have the first-born of man redeemed, and you shall also have the firstling of unclean animals redeemed. . . . But the firstlings of cattle, sheep or goats may not be redeemed; they are consecrated (*qadosh*)’.
- 51 Exodus 26: 31: ‘You shall make a curtain of blue, purple and crimson yarns and fine twisted linen; it shall have a design of cherubim worked into it. Hang it upon four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and having hooks of gold set in four sockets of silver. Hang the curtain under the clasps, and carry the Ark of the Pact there, behind the curtain, so that the curtain shall serve you as a partition between the Holy and the Holy of Holies (*ben ha-qodesh u’ven qodesh ha-qodashim*). Place the cover upon the Ark of the Pact in the Holy of Holies’.
- 52 Exodus 30: 31ff.: ‘This shall be an anointing oil sacred to Me throughout the ages. *It must not be rubbed on any person’s body*, and you must not make anything like it in the same proportions; it is sacred, to be held sacred by you. Whoever compounds its like, or *puts any of it on a layman*, shall be cut off from his kin. . . . [the recipe follows – ‘Make them into incense, a compound expertly blended, refined, pure, sacred (*m’mulach, tahor, qodesh*)’] . . . you must not make any in the same proportions for yourselves . . . *whoever makes any like it, to smell of it*, shall be cut off from his kin’ [Emphases mine].
- 53 Numbers 5: 11: ‘If any man’s wife has gone astray and broken faith with him in that a man has had carnal relations with her unbeknown to her husband, and she keeps secret the fact that she has defiled herself without being forced, and there is no witness against her . . .’
- 54 The high priest wore eight holy garments, four of linen, four of gold. Breeches, shirt, belt and turban were of linen, while the coat had golden bells amongst its ornaments; the breastplate and apron were woven from seven different threads including gold; the headplate was made of gold.
- 55 Exodus 28: 2: ‘Make sacral vestments (*big’dai qodesh*) for your brother Aaron for dignity and adornment. Next you shall instruct all who are skilful, whom I have endowed with the gift of skill, to make Aaron’s vestments, for consecrating him to serve me as priest’.
- 56 Exodus 28: 36ff.: ‘It shall be on Aaron’s forehead, that Aaron may take away any sin arising from the holy things that the Israelites consecrate, from any of their sacred donations; it shall be on his forehead at all times, to win acceptance for them before the Lord’.
- 57 Here the root of the word ‘messiah’ is seen – *mashiach*, the anointed one.
- 58 Exodus 29: 10–44.
- 59 The rabbinic explanation is: the ear should hear the word of God, the right hand be involved in sacred deeds, the foot direct the body in the ways of God.

- 60 I Kings 8: 6: 'The priests brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place underneath the wings of the cherubim, in the Shrine of the House, (*el d'vir ha-bayit*) in the Holy of Holies'.
- 61 Five types of sacrifice:  
 Free-will offerings:  
*Burnt offering – Olah (qodesh qodashim)*: consumed by fire; bull, ram, male goat, pigeon/turtledove.  
*Meal (cereal) offering – Mincha (qodesh qodashim)*: half consumed by fire – some eaten; flour, water, oil, spice.  
*Peace offering – Shelamim (qodesh qal)*: some burnt, some to priests/offerer; ox, cow, ram, ewe, m/f goat, loaves (less holy).  
 Obligatory offerings:  
*Sin offering – Chata'at (qodesh qodashim)*: half consumed by fire – some eaten; female goat or lamb.  
*Guilt offering – Asham (qodesh qodashim)*: half consumed by fire – some eaten; ram.
- 62 Post-exilic rabbinic law established a public marriage ceremony wherein the groom states to his bride: Behold, thou art consecrated unto me . . . *Harei at m'qudeshet li*. A woman is set apart for her husband.
- 63 For the ceremonial purity of the camp to be assured, three classes of unclean persons were excluded from the community: 'remove from the camp anyone with an eruption or a discharge and anyone defiled by a corpse' (Numbers 5: 1).
- 64 Durkheim 1971: 349.
- 65 Leviticus 12: 4:

She shall remain in a state of blood purification for thirty-three days: she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until her period of purification is completed. . . . On the completion of her period of purification . . . she shall bring to the priest . . . a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. . . . If however, her means do not suffice for a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons . . . The priest shall make expiation on her behalf, and she shall be clean.

- 66 Leviticus 15: 3:

The uncleanness from his discharge shall mean the following – whether his member runs with the discharge or is stopped up so that there is no discharge, his uncleanness means this: Any bedding on which the one with the discharge lies shall be unclean, and every object on which he sits shall be unclean. Anyone who touches his bedding shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening. Whoever sits on an object on which the one with the discharge has sat shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening. Whoever touches the body of the one with the discharge shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening. If one with a discharge spits on one who is clean, the latter shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening. Any means for riding that one with a discharge has mounted shall be unclean; whoever touches anything that was under him shall be unclean until evening; and whoever carries such things shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening. If one with a discharge, without having rinsed his hands in water, touches another person, that person shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening. An earthen vessel that one with a discharge touches shall be broken; and any wooden implement shall be rinsed with water.

## 67 Leviticus 15: 16–18:

When a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and remain unclean until evening. All cloth or leather on which semen falls shall be washed in water and remain unclean until evening. And if a man has carnal relations with a woman, they shall bathe in water and remain unclean until evening.

## 68 Exodus 19: 15.

## 69 Leviticus 15: 19:

When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood from her body, she shall remain in her impurity seven days; whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. Anything that she lies on during her impurity shall be unclean; and anything that she sits on shall be unclean. Anyone who touches her bedding shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; and anyone who touches any object on which she has sat shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; Be it the bedding or be it the object on which she has sat, on touching it he shall be unclean until evening; And if a man lies with her, her impurity is communicated to him; he shall be unclean seven days, and any bedding on which he lies shall become unclean.

## 70 Leviticus 15: 28–30:

When she becomes clean of her discharge, she shall count off seven days, and after that she shall be clean. On the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, and bring them to the priest at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The priest shall offer the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering; and the priest shall make expiation on her behalf, for her unclean discharge, before the Lord.

## 71 Lewis 1987: 593.

## 72 Leviticus 11: 25.

## 73 Leviticus 11: 29.

## 74 Leviticus 11: 42; Eruvin 13b.

## 75 Numbers 6: 24–6.

## 76 Exodus 20: 22. The same rule applied to the building of Solomon's Temple (I Kings 6:7): When the House was built, only finished stones cut at the quarry were used, so that no hammer or axe or any iron tool was heard in the House while it was being built.

## 77 Robertson Smith 1972: 338: 'the significant part of the ceremony does not lie in the death of the victim, but in the application of its life or life-blood'.

78 Leviticus 11: 36: 'a fountain or a cistern [i.e. spring or well] wherein is a gathering of water, *miqveh mayyim*, shall be clean'.

## 79 Durkheim 1971: 337.

## 80 Lukes 1973: 471.

## 81 Leviticus 19: 5:

[The sacrifice of well-being may be eaten on the day of sacrifice, or the day after] 'but what is left by the third day must be consumed in fire . . . and he who eats of it shall bear his guilt, for he has profaned what is sacred to the Lord; that person shall be cut off from his kin.'

## 82 A rabbinic explanation: because the cedar is tall, and haughtiness caused the affliction, the person should feel humbled by the use of the lowly shrub, hyssop. The red thread symbolizes sin; the bird that flies away represents freedom from sin.

- 83 The symbolism of hair as part of sacrifice is discussed by Robertson Smith 1972: 334: 'In their origin the hair-offering and the offering of one's own blood are precisely similar in meaning'. Ceremonies that included shaving all body hair, such as the cleansing of the leper, and preparation for service in the sanctuary by priests, retain this significance.
- 84 Robertson Smith 1972: 339 discusses in detail the symbolism of sacrificial blood, including the pit below the altar into which the blood flowed.  
 Majno (1991: 403) describes the *taurobolium* used at the time of Galen, as 'the ultimate in blood cure' . . . 'a rebirth ceremony' where 'the man who wished to be spiritually reborn descended . . . into a pit covered with stout planks, loosely joined and pierced with many holes. Then above him, a priest sacrificed a bull; the blood trickled down into the pit, to the sound of flutes, and the man soaked up as much of it as he could. Then he walked out at the other end of the pit, as out of a grave, happily reborn'.
- 85 Deuteronomy 21: 22:  
 If a man is guilty of a capital offence and is put to death, and you impale him on a stake, you must not let his corpse remain on the stake overnight, but must bury him the same day. For an impaled body is an affront to God: you shall not defile the land . . .
- 86 Durkheim 1971: 412.
- 87 Deuteronomy 30: 15–16:  
 See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. For I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess.
- 88 Lewis 1987: 602.
- 89 Douglas 1993: 212:  
 'Miriam's story affords a glimpse of theological reflections on life and death. Leprosy in the Bible is equated with idolatry, and idolatry is equated with death; here is Miriam, suspended miserably between living and dying, her flesh half-consumed.'
- 90 Lewis 1987: 599.
- 91 Lewis 1987: 593: 'There was . . . a contrast between priest and leper, a contrast of type and anti-type, the opposition between holy and unclean. The principle at stake was the value set on life as against death'.  
 Ibid p. 601: 'The underlying religious theme . . . is the contrast between death and life; death is polluting, life is the great good. Priest and nazirite contrast with leper; priest and nazirite have to do with holy things; the leper is tainted as if by death'.
- 92 Douglas 1993: 158: ' . . . put lepers outside the camp (and) . . . anybody contaminated by corpse contact. This is the Lord's first taboo. His worshippers must have nothing to do with death, nor with dead bodies'.
- 93 Lewis 1987: 602.
- 94 Eilberg-Schwartz 1990: 185.
- 95 Lewis 1987: 608.
- 96 Neusner 1990: 37: 'The dual Torah consists of Written Law (Pentateuch) and Oral Law (Mishnah and Gemarah, i.e. the Talmud)'.

## 8 SACRIFICE AND PRAYER IN ISRAELITE RELIGION

- 1 Exodus 19: 6 ‘. . . *mamlekhet kohanim ve-goy qadosh*’.
- 2 Leviticus 2: 9; Leviticus 3: 11.
- 3 Genesis 4: 3.
- 4 Genesis 8: 21.
- 5 Genesis 18: 26.
- 6 Exodus 32: 11.
- 7 Deuteronomy 11: 13–17.
- 8 Leviticus 7: 29.
- 9 Numbers 18: 24.
- 10 Deuteronomy 17: 1: ‘You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep that has any defect of a serious kind, for that is abhorrent to the Lord your God’.
- 11 Margolis and Marx 1960: 166.
- 12 Josephus *War*: 63.
- 13 Leviticus 22: 4.
- 14 Lewis 1987: 608.
- 15 Hertz 1985: 592.
- 16 Durkheim 1971: 16.
- 17 Durkheim 1971: 341.
- 18 Robertson Smith 1972: 401.
- 19 From the *Encyclopedia Judaica* entry on *Sacrifice*:

Despite the hardship and privations of this period and the famine which raged, the Temple service continued until the walls of the city were breached by the Romans on 17th Tammuz. The *tamid* sacrifice then had to be discontinued due to the lack of lambs and qualified priests within the Temple precincts [Ta’anit 4:6; Josephus *War* 6:94]. Three weeks later on the 9th of Av the Temple was destroyed by the Romans and the sacrificial system came to an end . . . Prayer took the place of the sacrifices. The *shacharit* service was regarded as taking the place of the morning *tamid* and the *minchah* service, the afternoon *tamid*.

- 20 Lewis 1987: 606.
- 21 Robertson Smith 1972: 240.
- 22 Robertson Smith 1972: 237 n. 1.
- 23 The *tenufa* is described as the sheaf of the first fruit of the barley harvest which was presented at the Sanctuary on the Passover festival. (Hertz 1985: 520).  
Leviticus 23: 10 reads: ‘bring the sheaf. . . unto the priest. And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord to be accepted for you’.  
It is also described in Leviticus 7: 29 as the priest’s share of the peace offerings: ‘The prescribed part of the offering being laid upon the offerer’s hands, the priest placed his own hands beneath those of the offerer, and moved them first forward and backward, and then upward and downward – symbolizing the consecration of the gift to God, the ruler of heaven and earth’ (Hertz 1985: 434).  
The *teruma* is described as ‘the general term for offerings made to God’ (Hertz 1985: 646). These offerings were removed from the main offering and set aside as a portion for the priests.
- 24 Lewis 1987: 605.
- 25 Lewis 1987: 600.
- 26 I Samuel 11: 15; Genesis 31: 54.
- 27 Leviticus 4: 12.
- 28 Leviticus 5: 17.
- 29 Leviticus 4: 35.

- 30 Leviticus 5: 25.  
 31 Leviticus 5: 16.  
 32 Numbers 6: 12.  
 33 Leviticus 19: 21.  
 34 In the Tractate *Ketubot* 1: 4 the bride-price of non-virgin women is discussed. Freed slave girls were automatically presumed to have been used sexually by their masters.  
 35 Leviticus 4: 6–7.  
 36 Hertz 1985: 418.  
 37 Leviticus 16: 5–6.  
 38 Leviticus 15: 30; Leviticus 12: 6; Leviticus 15: 15.  
 39 Leviticus 14: 31.  
 40 Leviticus 5: 1–3, 6.  
 41 Leviticus 14: 37; Leviticus 13: 49.  
 42 Leviticus 14: 49, 52.  
 43 Jastrow 1989: 447.  
 44 Hertz 1985: 417.  
 45 Neusner 1990: 27 n. 1:

The writings that speak of the caste system – priests, Levites and Israelites – and of the Temple cult . . . are ascribed to a priestly authorship; these writers produced the Book of Leviticus and most of the Book of Numbers as well as passages in the Book of Exodus that deal with the Tabernacle.

- 46 Leviticus 17: 3.  
 47 Lewis 1987: 600.  
 48 Jastrow 1989: 312.  
 49 Leviticus 17: 11.  
 50 Leviticus 8: 15, 22.  
 51 Leviticus 14: 14.  
 52 Numbers 35: 33.  
 53 Durkheim 1971: 137: ‘The blood lost by a young initiate during the very violent operations he must undergo has very particular virtues: it is used in various ceremonies’.

In his note (no. 6), he expands on this: ‘Among the Warramunga, the blood from the circumcision is drunk by the mother. Among the Bibinga, the blood on the knife which was used in the sub-incision must be licked off by the initiate. In general, the blood coming from the genital organs is regarded as especially sacred’.

The Hebrew male is marked off as separated from other male infants by his circumcision; the sacred animals to be offered are separated from profane creatures by the particular stroke of ritual slaughter. Eilberg-Schwartz (1990: 142–76) has discussed in detail the characteristics of fertility, virility, maturity and genealogy with regard to circumcision of the Hebrew male.

- 54 Thus the side-locks and beard of the orthodox Jew.  
 55 Josephus *Antiquities* VIII, 340; compare I Kings 18: 28. Kottke 1994: 105  
 56 I Samuel 28: 7.  
 57 Numbers 8: 6; Leviticus 14: 8.  
 58 Numbers 6: 5.  
 59 Hertz 1985: 592.  
 60 Weber (1967: 94–5) has postulated that all soldiers before going into battle consecrated themselves by becoming nazirites:

‘Midway between . . . individual heroes appearing as ecstatic berserk and the acute collective ecstasy of the war dance stands the ascetic training of a body

of professional warriors for war ecstasy. Such is, in vestige indeed to be found in the 'Nazarites', the 'separated ones'. Originally they were ascetically trained warrior ecstasies who . . . left their hair unshorn and abstained from alcohol and originally, also, from sexual intercourse. . . . In the later pacifistic development the Nazariteship is transformed into an asceticism of mortification by virtue of a vow to lead a ritualistically exemplary life, above all, to abstain from uncleanness'. But Weber's conceit stretches the imagination, for if warriors had routinely taken such vows, these would constantly have been broken because of corpse pollution on the field of battle; in any event, all who wished to sacrifice at the Temple were required to fulfil the ceremonies for purging of ritual pollution.

- 61 Numbers 6: 6–11.  
 62 Leviticus 14: 12.  
 63 Hertz 1985: 431.  
 64 Leviticus 14: 13–14.  
 65 Leviticus 15: 31.  
 66 Dr H. Maccoby, Leo Baeck College, London (December 1994).  
 67 Mauss 2003: 55.  
 68 Hertz 1985: 415, 432. Leviticus Chapters 3 and 7.  
 69 Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* 1976: 41, readings from the Mishnah, Massechet Zevachim 5: 6–8.  
 70 Josephus *Antiquities* Book III: ix.  
 71 *Tyche* may be allied to a belief which, probably influenced by Babylonian astrology, could be equated with the rabbinic idea of *mazal*, a planet that controls destiny. *Tyche*, Goddess of Fortune, had a Roman counterpart, *Fortuna*. According to Graves, *Tyche*, the daughter of Zeus, was 'an artificial deity invented by the philosophers'. Zeus gave her 'the power to decide what the fortune of this or that mortal shall be. On some she heaps gifts from a horn of plenty, others she deprives of all that they have. *Tyche* is altogether irresponsible in her awards, and runs about juggling with a ball to exemplify the uncertainty of chance'. *Fortuna*, too, was represented with the cornucopia symbolizing plenty, a ball, and also a ship's rudder showing her control over destiny.  
 72 Shabbat 156a.  
 73 Jastrow 1989: 210.  
 74 Josephus *Antiquities* XV: vii:§ 7.  
 75 The Three Fates were the daughters of Zeus and Themis. They determined human destiny, which was envisaged as a thread drawn and cut; Clotho drew the thread from her distaff, Lechesis wound the coil of life and Atropos cut the thread at the end of the lifespan.  
 76 Ecclesiastes 3: 22.  
 77 Magic Bowl M163 Levene (2003: 126): This was kindly shown to me by Dr Dan Levene. The bowl is unique and bears a remarkable inscription, part of which reads: 'And just as the house of Korah and Dathan and Abiram was pressed – just so may this Isha son of Ifra Hurmiz, by every name he has, be crushed and trod under. And may his lot and fortune and star signs and stars and magic acts and idols and commands and hateful words and evil thoughts be pressed and trod under the feet and command and authority of this Mihlad and Baran sons of Mirdukh'.  
 78 Naveh and Shaked 1987: 124; 1993: 132.  
 79 Naveh and Shaked 1987: 37: '... the mosaic pavement of three synagogues of the fourth to the sixth centuries, those of Bet Alpha, Hamat-Tiberias and Na'aran . . . (show) *Helios in the centre of the mosaic, riding his chariot in the middle of the zodiac*'.

- 80 Naveh and Shaked 1987: 37.  
81 Exodus 20: 4.

## 9 ORDERING THE BODY IN A WORLD OF DISORDER

- 1 Douglas 1989: 96.
- 2 Neusner 1989: 69.
- 3 Preuss 1993: 61; Oholot 1: 8.
- 4 Exodus 25–8.
- 5 Abraham 1993; Steinberg 1993.
- 6 Ketubot 19a; Yoma 82a.
- 7 Yoma 84b.
- 8 Shabbat 66a.
- 9 Shabbat 6:2.
- 10 Shabbat 115b.
- 11 Pirke Avot 3: 19.
- 12 Hullin 7b; Baba Kamma 2b.
- 13 Baba Kamma 2b.
- 14 Shabbat 32a.
- 15 Ketubot 111a.
- 16 Sanhedrin 17b.
- 17 Baba Batra 58b.
- 18 Shabbat 129b.
- 19 Shabbat 33a.
- 20 Pirke Avot 6: 4.
- 21 Shabbat 40b.
- 22 Bechorot 45b; Shabbat 92a.
- 23 Berachot 58b.
- 24 Baba Batra 146a; Nedarim 37b.
- 25 Baba Metzia 107b.
- 26 Pesachim 110a; Berachot 55b.
- 27 Pirke Avot 5: 9.
- 28 Hagigah 16a.
- 29 Pesachim 110a–112b.
- 30 Shabbat 32b.
- 31 Berachot 43b.
- 32 Yoma 77b.
- 33 Shabbat 109a.
- 34 Hullin 106a.
- 35 Ta'anit 20b.
- 36 The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* mentions a Phoenician amulet from Arslan Tash, dating from the seventh century BCE, intended to protect women in childbirth: '*Incantations: O Flying One, O goddess, O Sasam . . . O god, O Strangler of Lambs! The house I enter you shall not enter; the court I tread you must not tread*'. The amulet's text and iconography have close parallels in Mesopotamian, Arabic and later Jewish folklore.
- 37 Black and Green 1992: 124.
- 38 But see Psalm 109 where God himself seems an active participant in the malevolent curses of the psalmist.
- 39 Campbell Thompson 1908: 64.
- 40 Pesachim 112b.
- 41 Pesachim 112b.



- 42 Montgomery 1913: 259 ff. Incantation Bowl describing Lilith's threats: '*I am going to the house of a woman in childbirth who is in pangs . . . to give her the sleep of death and to take the child she is bearing, to suck his blood and to suck the marrow of his bones and to devour his flesh.* But Elija the prophet foils her plans, *in the name of Yah God of Israel, by Gematria TaR'YaG [613 commandments], Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the name of the holy Shekhina [God's presence], and the ten holy Seraphs, the ofannim and the hayyot [wheels and holy beasts] and the Ten Books of the Law*'.
- 43 Montgomery 1913: 47.
- 44 Gittin 70a.
- 45 Berachot 62a.
- 46 Genesis 2: 24.
- 47 Berachot 54b, 55b.
- 48 Berachot 5: 5.
- 49 Numbers Rabba 18: 12; Nedarim 39b.
- 50 Nedarim 40a, 41a.
- 51 Kiddushin 4: 14.
- 52 Rosh Hashana 18a.
- 53 Hagigah 3b.
- 54 Sanhedrin 65b; Niddah 17a.
- 55 Preuss 1993: 311.
- 56 I Samuel 16: 16.
- 57 Shabbat 66b.
- 58 Pesachim 111b.
- 59 This is a typical Talmudic juxtaposition of ideas. The Tractate *Gittin* (sing. *get*) deals with divorce. The mention of *kordiakos* initiates the famous magico-medical catalogue.
- 60 Pesachim 112a.
- 61 Meyer and Smith 1994: 49.
- 62 Baba Metzia 85b.
- 63 Genesis 1: 26; 2: 7; 7: 22.
- 64 Niddah 31a.
- 65 Ecclesiastes Rabba 5: 10.
- 66 Niddah 31a.
- 67 Genesis 1: 28.
- 68 Berachot 33b.
- 69 Berachot 61a.
- 70 Baba Batra 16a.
- 71 Yevamot 63b.
- 72 Niddah 13a.
- 73 Sotah 17a.
- 74 Feldman 1968: 156; Nedarim 20b.
- 75 Sanhedrin 107a.
- 76 Sanhedrin 107a.
- 77 Niddah 17a.
- 78 Ketubot 77b.
- 79 Genesis Rabba 64: 5; Shabbat 86a; Kallah Rabbati Ch. 1, fol. 52a 15
- 80 Niddah 17a; Pesachim 112b.
- 81 Gittin 70a.
- 82 Kallah Rabbati Ch. 1, fol. 52a 23.
- 83 Judges 2: 10.
- 84 Rahmani 1981: 175.
- 85 Semachot 1:2.

- 86 Semachot 1: 3–4.
- 87 Berachot 8a.
- 88 Avodah Zarah 20b.
- 89 Yerushalmi Mo'ed Qatan 3: 7.
- 90 re Gan Eden: Shabbat 152b; Baba Metzia 83b.  
re Gehinnom: Hagigah 15a; Berachot 28b; Eruvin 19a
- 91 Shabbat 152a, 152b.
- 92 Rahmani 1981: 175.
- 93 Ossuaries of the Chalcolithic period have been found in Israel at Ben Shemen, Azor and Givatayim. More than 100 ossuaries might be deposited in a single cave.
- 94 Rahmani 1981: 175.
- 95 Yerushalmi Berachot 2: 4c.
- 96 Eruvin 41b.
- 97 Ketubot 103b.
- 98 Goldberg, S.A. 1996: 17.
- 99 Rahmani 1982: 111; Evel Rabbati 12: 8.
- 100 Rahmani 1982: 111; Evel Rabbati 13: 8.
- 101 Berachot 10a.
- 102 Genesis 2: 7; Ta'anit 22b.
- 103 Leviticus Rabba 34:3.
- 104 Elior 1987: 890.
- 105 Yoma 85a.
- 106 Tosefta Shabbat 4:9.

10 APPROXIMATING GOD, APPROPRIATING AUTHORITY:  
*HEKHALOT AND MERKAVA LITERATURE*

- 1 The earliest evidence for the speculations on the chariot is found in texts of the Mishnaic period, but production of the *Hekhalot* literature is thought to have continued throughout the Talmudic period and into the early Gaonic period, that is up until the ninth century.
- 2 Schäfer 1992: 160.
- 3 Elior 1990: 242: 'Heavenly ascents are ubiquitous in the literature of late antiquity and magical texts expressing cognate ideas and practices may be found throughout the Greek magical and theurgical literature'.
- 4 Hagigah 2: 1.
- 5 Scholem 1960: 5–8.
- 6 Ezekiel 1.
- 7 Exodus 24: 9–10; Isaiah 6: 1–3.
- 8 Marks 1975: 29–30: '... belief in the power of the look seems quite universal and independent of culture, as is the use of large staring eyes in defensive magic'.
- 9 Exodus 3: 2. Woolley 1940: 55: 'Against the right shoulder was a double axe-head of *electrum*, and an *electrum* axe-head of normal type was by the left shoulder; behind the body there were jumbled together in a heap a gold head-dress, bracelets, beads, and amulets, lunate earrings, and spiral rings of gold wire'.
- 10 Schäfer 1992: 131.
- 11 Hagigah 14b; Yerushalmi Hagigah 2: 1.
- 12 Talmon 1989: 24: 'from ... 2nd or even ... 3rd century BCE'.
- 13 Hagigah 13b-14a.
- 14 Genesis Rabba 3.
- 15 Avodah Zarah 3b.
- 16 Berachot 18b; Sanhedrin 89b; Yoma 77a.

- 17 Hullin 30b.
- 18 Rappoport 1995 vol. I: 15; Genesis Rabba 6.
- 19 Hagigah 16a.
- 20 Elior 1999: 104.
- 21 The ritual, based on Leviticus 16, appears in the Talmudic tractate *Yoma*.
- 22 Gruenwald 1980: 96.
- 23 Cohen 1975: 19; Elior 1999: 153; Berachot 7a.
- 24 Schäfer 1992: 112.
- 25 Robertson Smith 1972: 182.
- 26 Schäfer 1992: 56.
- 27 Schäfer 1992: 73.
- 28 Schäfer 1992: 51.
- 29 Deutsch 1995: 75.
- 30 Schäfer 1992: 108.
- 31 Janowitz 1992: 186; 188.
- 32 Deutsch 1995: 101 quoting *Hekhalot Synopse* § 159.
- 33 Elior 1993/4: 50.
- 34 Shaked 1995.
- 35 Exodus 35: 31.
- 36 I Kings 3: 28.
- 37 Proverbs 3: 15.
- 38 Proverbs 8: 22.
- 39 Lewis 1987: 607.
- 40 Deutsch 1995: 47, citing Stroumsa.
- 41 Talmon (1989: 22–3) has demonstrated the difficulty of ascertaining an exact date. The book of Daniel and possibly also the book of Esther are thought to have been composed during the Hellenistic period.
- 42 Deutsch 1995: 148.
- 43 Wolfson 1992.
- 44 Gruenwald 1980.
- 45 Halperin 1988.
- 46 Alexander 1986.
- 47 Schäfer 1992: 5.
- 48 Scholem 1991: 24.
- 49 Deuteronomy 18: 10.

#### 11 IMPRECATIONS, HEALING AND PROTECTION: THE ‘BOOK OF SECRETS’, AMULETS, INCANTATION BOWLS

- 1 Lesses 1995: 201.
- 2 Lesses 1998: 124.
- 3 Numbers 12.
- 4 Elior 1997: 226.
- 5 Levene 2003: 15.
- 6 Budge 1971: 177.
- 7 Levene 2003: 129–30:

The use of a ritually mutilated animal as an act of sympathetic magic and its burial with an amulet is not unknown in the Jewish magical tradition. . . . In the *Sword of Moses* . . . a recipe . . . recommends the use of a white cock. . . the user is instructed to take the cock’s beak and place an inscribed metal foil within it; it is then to be hidden in the clothing of the person the user wishes to affect.

- 8 Levene 2003: 3.  
 9 Ta'anit 19a; 23a.  
 10 Trachtenberg 1982: 117.  
 11 Geller and Levene 1998: 335.  
 12 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, entry on *Avodah* – sacred service.  
 13 Abusch 1989: 39.  
 14 Campbell Thompson 1908: xxv.  
 15 Abusch 1989: 40–1.  
 16 Birnbaum Prayer Book for the Day of Atonement.  
 17 The root *ch-t-a*, sin, is used for 'cleansed' – *vechitei*.  
 18 Mishnah Yoma 7: 3.  
 19 Schiffman and Swartz 1992: 19, citing Naveh and Shaked 1987: 29–30.  
 20 Pesachim 112a.  
 21 Alexander 1986: 355; Naveh and Shaked 1987: 87  
 22 Naveh and Shaked 1987: 37.  
 23 Exodus 4: 2; 14: 16; 17: 5; 28: 36.  
 24 Gittin 68b.  
 25 Mishnah Zevachim 5.  
 26 Leviticus 16: 18; Mishnah Zevachim 5.  
 A stone altar with horns, about 25 cm square and 50 cm in height, is in the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem.  
 27 Geller, personal communication.  
 28 Levene notes that 'since 1853, when Thomas Ellis published the first five magic bowls . . . the number of edited texts that have become available for study has only been around two hundred'.  
 29 Departmental seminar, University College London.  
 30 Montgomery 1913: 259  
 31 Steiner 1967: 66  
 32 Talmon 1989: 27: 'The canonical books . . . are defined by the phrase *mitme'im et hayadayim*, which sets them apart from all other books'. [The Qumran sect regarded their own scrolls as holy, also defiling the hands.]  
 33 Yerushalmi Shabbat 6: 8c; Montgomery 1913: 15; Alexander 1986: 362 re The Great Seance, *Hekhalot Rabbati* §198; Scholem 1960: 11  
 Montgomery 1913: 221: 'The Skull Incantation:  
*Bound and sealed are the house and the life of this Ispiza bar Arha and Yandundisnat bar Ispandarmed and bat . . . Simkoi from the Sun and Heat, from the Devil, the Satan, the male Demon, the female Lilith, evil Spirits, the impious Amulet Spirit, the Lilith-Spirit male or female, the Eye of man or woman, the Eye of contumely; the Eye which looks right into the heart; the mystery which belongs to the Evil Potency, that impious Lord; from the evil hateful Potency; from disturbing Vision; from evil Spirits . . .*'  
 34 Alexander 1986: 362.  
 35 Scholem 5720: 1960: 11.  
 36 Mauss 1972: 38.  
 37 Mauss 1972: 58.  
 38 Shaked 1995.  
 39 Professor Shaul Shaked, personal communication, 28/4/98.  
 40 Text supplied by Professor Shaul Shaked at Symposium *Officina Magica* – The Workings of Magic. UCL June 1999.  
 41 Levene 2003: 11, 74.  
 42 Mauss 1972: 47.

## 12 EPILOGUE

1 Scholem 1995: 98

2 Hirschberg, Peter, in the *Jerusalem Report*, 16 November, 1995, p. 17:

Before Rabin, the last person so cursed was Saddam Hussein. One day during the 1991 Gulf War, as Scuds rained down on Israel, a minyan (quorum) of fasting kabbalists gathered at the tomb of the prophet Samuel just outside Jerusalem. There they entered a dark cave, where one of the holy men placed a copper tray on a rock and lit the 24 black candles he'd placed on it. As the mystics circled the candles, they chanted the curse seven times, calling on the angels not merely to visit death upon 'Saddam the son of Sabha,' but to ensure that his wife was given to another man. That done, small lead balls and pieces of earthenware were thrown on the candles and the shofar (ram's horn) was sounded. 'The black candles,' explains *Yediot Aharonot* journalist Amos Nevo, who documented the ceremony, 'symbolize the person being cursed. When they're put out, it's as if the person's soul is being extinguished.' Lead, he says, is for the ammunition in the war against the cursed one, earthenware symbolizes death, and the shofar opens the skies so the curse will be heard.

3 Millis, Joseph, Jerusalem: (The plane) was chartered for £2,500 by Shas activist Moshe Nimni, who asked some of the country's top kabbalists to join him. Over the Golan and Hebron the pilot was instructed to circle three times.

4 Tarnopolsky, Noga: 'Losing the Western Wall'. *Jerusalem Post* 15 May 2004. [One of the Internet sites quoted: 'place-a-note-in-the-wall'.]

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